DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 405 487 CE 073 699

AUTHOR Sanguinetti, Jill
TITLE Negotiating Competence: The Impact on Teaching Practice of the Certificate of General Education for Adults (CGEA). Adult Literacy Research Network.
INSTITUTION National Languages and Literacy Inst., Melbourne (Australia).
REPORT NO ISBN-1-875579-52-8
PUB DATE 95
NOTE 121p.; Funded by the Adult Literacy Research Network Node for Victoria.
AVAILABLE FROM Language Australia Publications, level 9, 300 Flinders Street, Melbourne, Victoria 3001, Australia.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC05 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adult Education; *Adult Educators; Adult Literacy; *Adult Students; Competency Based Education; Educational Practices; Foreign Countries; *General Education; Influences; *Student Certification; Teacher Attitudes; Teaching Methods
IDENTIFIERS *Certificates of General Educ Adults (Australia); Impact Studies

ABSTRACT

The impact of the introduction of Australia's competency-based Certificates of General Education for Adults (CGEA) in 1994 was examined through a participatory action research-based study. Data were collected from 3 sources: reflective journals kept by 12 practitioners, interviews with 13 practitioners, and related documents. Accreditation of the CGEA was credited with the following positive impacts: bringing adult literacy and basic education in from the margins; offering adult students access to mainstream credentials and pathways; and aiding development of good teaching practice by facilitating a more rigorous approach to theoretical underpinnings and curriculum planning/delivery. The following problems arising from introduction of the CGEA were noted: inadequate funding for required moderation and professional development; encouragement of "creaming" because of funding by outcomes; confusion regarding CGEA pathways; inadequate understanding of the CGEA by providers of industrial and vocational training; inadequate guidance on curriculum development; and increased levels of pressure on teachers and students. Review and revision of the CGEA in light of the study findings was recommended. (The bibliography contains 65 references. Appendixes constituting approximately 50% of this document contain 11 teachers' reflections on the CGEA's impact on their practice and examples of CGEA competency levels and elements.) (MN)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 405 487

ADULT LITERACY RESEARCH NETWORK

NEGOTIATING COMPETENCE: The Impact on Teaching Practice of the CGEA

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

J Kindler

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

CE073699

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

THE NATIONAL LANGUAGES AND LITERACY INSTITUTE OF AUSTRALIA

Adult Literacy Research Network Node for Victoria

Negotiating Competence:

The Impact on Teaching Practice of the Certificate of General Education for Adults (CGEA)

by Jill Sanguinetti

THE NATIONAL
LANGUAGES
AND LITERACY
INSTITUTE
OF AUSTRALIA

Sanguinetti, Jill, 1994 - .
Negotiating Competence:
the Impact on Teaching Practice of the Certificate of General Education for Adults (CGEA).

Bibliography.

ISBN 1 875579 52 8.

1. Adult education - Victoria. 2. Basic education - Victoria - Curricula.
3. Literacy - Australia.
I. National Languages and Literacy Institute of
Australia. Victorian Office. II. Adult Literacy Research Network Node
for Victoria. III. Title.

374.012

© 1995 National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia

Published by the National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia Limited
ACN 051 438 825

Table of Contents

Summary	1
1. Introduction	3
2. Aims	5
3. Methodology	6
4. Findings	
4.1. Institutional and environmental issues	9
4.2. Impact of the CGEA on teaching generally	11
4.3. Issues of assessment	18
4.4. Reading and writing streams	25
4.5. Oral communication	28
4.6. Numeracy	31
4.7. General curriculum option	34
4.8. Moderation	36
4.9 Implementation	38
5. Discussion: Exploring Alternative Modes of Competency-based Assessment	41
6. Summary of Findings	
6.1 Achievements	46
6.2 Issues for further research and analysis	47
6.3 Recommendations	52
Endnotes	53
Bibliography	54
Appendices	
1. Eleven Teachers' Reflections on the Impact of the CGEA on their Practice	58
1. Real life texts cannot be neatly boxed	59
2. The 'nitty gritty' of teaching with the CGEA	63
3. A better-informed teacher, but a more anxious one	67
4. The CGEA neglects the joy of learning	71
5. Fires in the imagination, or buckets of busy work?	74
6. Holism, reductionism and the Suzuki method	80
7. Better numeracy teaching with the CGEA	86
8. The CGEA in the Victorian prison system	90
9. The use of authentic texts frustrated by rigid domains	95
10. The CGEA stifles creativity and confidence	100
11. We are not experts - yet!	102
2. CGEA: Examples of Competency Levels and Elements	
1. CGEA Streams	105
2. Summary of Reading and Writing Competencies	106
3.1 Reading and Writing Module 2, element 2.1	107
3.2 Oral Communication Module 2, element 2.1	108
3.3 Numerical and Mathematical Module 2	109
3.4 General Curriculum Option, Module 2, element 2.1	110

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I thank the many adult literacy and basic education practitioners who have collaborated in this evaluation project by contributing their time, their experiences and their ideas: They include:

Anne Alexander, Broadmeadows COT, Coburg Prison Campus
Chris Anderson, Holmesglen COT
Robyn Archer, VUT, Werribee Campus
Bronwyn Bannon, Maryborough Learning Centre
Delia Bradshaw, Adult educator
Laura Brearley, Moonee Ponds Community Centre and Barton COT
Katherine Brewer-Vinga, Linda Wyse & Associates
Cher Chidzey
Sarah Deasey, Adult Basic Education Resources and Information Service (ARIS)
Cathy Donovan, NMCOT, Greensborough Campus
Vivien Eckhaus, Moonee Ponds Community Centre and Carlton Contact Neighbourhood House
Barbara Goulborn, Broadmeadows COT
Angela Harrison, Glenroy Adult Literacy and Community Learning Centre
Diane Hawken, Narre Neighbours Adult Education Program
Heather Haughton, Victorian Adult Literacy and Basic Education Council
Jeanette John, Barwon South Western Regional Council of ACFE
Robin Kenrick, NMCOT, Preston Campus
Nguyen Lam, Moonee Ponds Community Centre and NMCOT
Jane Lucas, Moonee Ponds Community Centre and NMCOT, Preston Campus
Michele Lucas, Broadmeadows COT
Beth Marr, NMCOT, Preston Campus
Roe Maas, NMCOT, Collingwood Campus,
Rob McCormack, WMCOT and James Cook University, Townsville
Fran O'Neil, NMCOT, Collingwood
Debbie Soccio, Training Initiatives Centre, WMCOT, Footscray
Kate Stewart, Maryborough Learning Centre
Liz Suda, Flemington Reading and Writing Centre
Jocelyn Taylor, Bacchus Marsh Centre of Adult Education
Sally Thompson, NMCOT and Heidelberg Further Education Collective

I wish to thank Bev Campbell, Co-ordinator, and John Wilson, Director of the ALRNN, for their generous assistance and support in the preparation of this report. I thank Jennifer Angwin and Robin McTaggart of Deakin University for their suggestions and encouragement.

I also wish to thank David Legge for his ideas and comradely support.

Jill Sanguinetti, May, 1995

PREFACE

The Adult Literacy Research Network Node for Victoria (ALRNNV) was established in 1993 with funding from the National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia (NLLIA). The ALRNNV is part of a national network to promote research into adult literacy and professional development of Adult Literacy and Basic Education (ALBE) staff. *Negotiating Competence* is the ALRNNV's second publication, and maintains the high standard set by *Practice in Reading Values*, edited by Delia Bradshaw (1995).

The ALRNNV identified evaluation of policy and practice as the focus for its first major event, a conference at Victoria University of Technology, on June 24, 1994. The burning issue for ALBE practitioners in Victoria at that time was the introduction of the Certificates of General Education for Adults (CGEA) by the Adult Community and Further Education Board (ACFEB). This volume is the report of an evaluation project initiated by the ALRNNV in order to follow up on the issues raised by practitioners on that day. The project was coordinated by Jill Sanguinetti who is a PhD student at Deakin University and an experienced teacher of adult literacy and English as a Second Language (ESL).

The CGEA represents one of the first attempts in Australia to define standards of attainment in ALBE, to articulate ALBE courses into formal training and education and to introduce competency-based criteria of performance. It encompasses four learning streams and four levels of attainment. The streams are: reading and writing, oral communication, numeracy and general curriculum options. The foundation Certificate is awarded to those who pass in all four streams at level two. The full Certificate is awarded on completion of the foundation Certificate and on attainment of competency at level four in any one of the four streams. Moderation processes have been introduced to ensure that standards are consistently applied.

The advent of the CGEA has been a significant challenge to ALBE practitioners in terms of curriculum development, pedagogy and new requirements for assessing and recording student progress. *Negotiating Competence* records the diverse ways in which teachers have responded to and negotiated that challenge.

Negotiating Competence makes a significant contribution to the dialogue between practitioners, curriculum officers and policy-makers. In its pages we hear the voices of committed ALBE practitioners grappling with new ideas which have profound implications for their students and for their own notions of pedagogical good practice. What emerges is a balanced picture of the benefits as well as the continuing tensions surrounding the introduction of the CGEA. It is hoped that the issues documented in the report will be addressed in the review and revision of the CGEA scheduled to take place in 1996. Two of the issues raised, assessment and recognition of prior learning, have provided the ALRNNV with a more specific focus for future research.

Negotiating Competence will be of interest to those working with the CGEA in Western Australia and New South Wales as well as in Victoria. As an account of the tensions and dilemmas experienced by practitioners in responding to a changing policy environment and the requirement of competency-based assessment, it

will also appeal to a wider audience of teachers, educational researchers, bureaucrats and policy-makers.

The ALRNNV congratulates all contributors to *Negotiating Competence*. We hope that this publication is some return for the hours of work invested. We are especially grateful to Jill Sanguinetti for crafting the contributions into an engaging narrative. Finally, the ALRNNV thanks the NLLIA for publishing the volume.

Professor John Dewar Wilson
Director, Adult Literacy Research Network Node for Victoria
Department of Education
Victoria University of Technology
Melbourne

The project, of which this report is the outcome, was made possible with funding from the Adult Literacy Research Network Node for Victoria. The project was managed by the Network coordinator, Beverley Campbell, with support form other members of the Network Steering Group. Special thanks to all who contributed to the Project and to the final report, and to the NLLIA staff.

SUMMARY

The introduction of the competency-based Certificates of General Education for Adults (CGEA)[1] in Victoria in 1994 sparked an energetic response amongst teachers of adult literacy and basic education (ALBE). At the 'Evaluation as Research' Seminar organised by the ALRNNV on 24 June, 1994, teachers debated a number of pedagogical issues in relation to the CGEA. Following that seminar, the 'Impact on teaching practice of the CGEA' evaluation project was launched in order to document in detail the teachers' responses and their experiences of the benefits of the Certificate as well as the difficulties of implementation in its first year of offering.

The project was planned as a contribution to discussions among practitioners, curriculum developers and policy makers about what constitutes 'good practice' in adult literacy and basic education and how accreditation can best serve the interests of students and the adult education and training sector. A participatory action research approach was adopted to work with teachers as they documented their reflections on the processes of implementing the Certificate.

This report therefore presents the diverse views and experiences of almost thirty practitioners who participated in the evaluation of the CGEA. The teachers come from a variety of providers (TAFE college, community-based providers, private providers and the prison system) and include two country providers. There is a spread of participants across the Reading and Writing, Oral Communication, Numeracy and the General Curriculum Option streams.

The participants contributed a multiplicity of views and experiences out of which some broad themes have emerged. Most practitioners are positive about the need for an accredited certificate in ALBE in order to 'bring ALBE in from the margins', to fulfil accountability requirements necessary to ensure funding to provide recognition of students' achievements and to provide a credential which will facilitate access to training pathways. On the other hand, funding for moderation and professional development is widely seen as inadequate. Furthermore, DEET's arrangements for funding by competitive tender (necessitating sessional staffing on short term contracts) is seen to undermine the continuities and relationships necessary for successful implementation.

In considering the impact of the CGEA on their teaching, the participants have acknowledged a number of benefits: it has provided a useful framework for planning of more 'balanced' curriculum across the four domains ('self expression, 'practical purposes' 'knowledge' and 'public debate'). It has encouraged teachers to 'tighten their practice'; to 'clear away the cobwebs of habit'; to be more rigorous in their planning and assessment; and to be more aware of the theoretical underpinnings of their work.

On the other hand, teachers have experienced considerable stress in their attempts to implement the Certificate in the first year. This is the result of the additional workload in planning, assessing, documenting and reporting entailed in competency-based assessment and what is perceived as increased 'bureaucratisation', decreased professional autonomy, some administrative and policy uncertainties and a number

of flaws and inconsistencies in the Certificate document itself. Some participants were also concerned about pressures that complex assessment procedures have placed on students, many of whom have failed in the past and are making their first tentative steps back into the educational and training system.

There was a high level of consensus on the issue of assessment in the CGEA. The majority of participants felt that the complex and stringent requirements of performance criterion-referenced assessment threatened to constrain and to distort good pedagogical practice. The emphasis on the need to perform all the criteria pertaining to each element could result in students, who are otherwise competent at a particular level, but who do not meet one or two of the criteria being failed. This pressure may encourage teachers to narrow their teaching to the assessment requirements instead of responding to the diverse areas of need and interest that students bring to classes. Teachers felt that their teaching practice tended to become fragmented; that they were becoming too focussed on 'ticking the boxes'; that the necessity to assess elements performatively within each domain led to an artificial separation of texts into rigid categories, and that the complexity of 'mapping' curriculum onto the framework of domains, criteria, range and conditions led to artificial assessment tasks. The view was frequently expressed that this form of competency-based assessment is ultimately not compatible with the complexity of literacy development and the different ways that individuals learn.

The report also includes a discussion of possible alternative modes of competency-based assessment that may be considered in developing future versions of the Certificate. It concludes with a discussion of issues for further research and analysis and makes recommendations for the future revision of the Certificate which is due to take place in 1996.

Eleven reports contributed by participants are attached as an Appendix. These reports, based on personal/professional diaries, record reflections and experiences of teachers working to implement the CGEA in diverse settings.

1. INTRODUCTION

The implementation of the CGEA needs to be understood in the context of the continuing evolution of 'good practice' in ALBE.

Dramatic changes are taking place in the ALBE sector, with the advent of DEET-funded labour market programs as the main source of funding and the advent of the competitive training market and competency-based training. At the same time, our ideas of what constitutes 'good practice' are also rapidly evolving. The recent changes in the direction of ALBE funding and the responses to them within the field can usefully be seen in terms of a contestation of discourses (Weedon, 1987; Yeatman, 1990). Current government policy discourses challenge many beliefs and principles which are embedded in the ALBE tradition. Discourses of competitiveness and human capital theory challenge 'social justice' discourses; discourses of efficiency and competency-based training confront discourses of critical literacy, progressivism and holistic, learner-centred pedagogies (Gilding, 1994; Lee, 1994; Luke, 1992; Marginson, 1993; Seddon, 1994).

The journal reports (reproduced in the Appendix) and the interviews upon which this report is based are case studies of teachers engaging discursively with the CGEA and the policies guiding its introduction. They also illustrate an intensified reflection on practice which has come about in response to the challenges that it represents. New understandings of 'good practice' are evolving as practical solutions to current problems are being sought and found.

These accounts of implementing the Certificate testify to the commitment of teachers who have worked hard and creatively to overcome a range of difficulties. This has sometimes been frustrating but overall has resulted in some rich learning that needs to be fed back into the further development of the CGEA. Many teachers felt shock and anger at the magnitude of the change required to their practice. Others experienced feelings of disempowerment and loss of confidence as they set out to fulfil requirements which sometimes were confusing and appeared to reduce their professional autonomy. Despite this, they have found ways of fulfilling the requirements or else have made creative compromises when they thought that was necessary. They have contributed many unpaid hours in writing new curriculum and devising assessment tasks. Many of the participants have also reported that the challenge of implementation, although frustrating, has raised their own awareness of what, why and how they are teaching and has been an opportunity to improve their practice and widen their repertoire.

The critique of the CGEA that has emerged from the experience of implementing the Certificate during 1994, and which is documented in this report, builds on the tradition in ALBE of struggle for better practice.

This evaluation project may be compared with the evaluation undertaken recently of the implementation of the competency-based Certificate of Spoken and Written English (CSWE) by the Adult Migrant Education Service (Bottomly, et al, 1994). That project documented the processes of implementation of the CSWE, the attitudinal changes undergone by the group of teachers and administrators who were

involved in implementing it and evaluated the goals of the implementation, the approach used and the level of commitment to its continuing delivery. By contrast, this CGEA evaluation project documents teachers' experiences in implementing the CGEA in the classroom and the perceptions of a group of teachers of its impact on their practice and on the field generally. Its object is to evaluate the CGEA framework itself, including, to some extent, the processes of its implementation. In this project, the focus therefore is on the teachers and their perceptions of pedagogical issues in relation to the CGEA. It also focuses on aspects of the CGEA that they have identified as needing to be addressed in a revised version.

2. AIMS

The aim of this project was to evaluate the CGEA, as a document and as an innovation for accreditation, curriculum planning and assessment in ALBE; in particular to evaluate its impact on teachers' practice during the implementation period.

In *Adult Literacy and Basic Education: A Guide to Program Evaluation* (Lambert, and Owen, 1993) the authors state that:

> In its broadest context, evaluation is the collection and analysis of information in order to facilitate informed decision making (p.1).

They identify the five basic purposes of evaluation as:

> program development,
> program clarification,
> program improvement,
> program monitoring,
> program justification (p.5).

In this evaluation project, all of these purposes are reflected in differing degrees. However, it could perhaps best be described as 'program improvement' which, according to Lambert et al, asks as typical questions:

> How is this service or activity going?
> Is it working?
> How is it affecting the target group or clients?
> What specific aspects need improvement? (p.8)

The design of the evaluation process was strongly informed by the principles of participatory action research. Participatory action research is theorised as a form of collaborative, self-reflective enquiry and documentation carried out by practitioners on their own practice in order to find ways of improving it. This enquiry includes developing a critical awareness of the social and political context (Brown, 1990; Carr and Kemmis, 1986; Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988; McTaggart, 1991; Wadsworth, 1991). In this case, a small core group of adult literacy teachers was actively involved in shaping the research process, developing the key questions, considering the findings and making the recommendations.

In this project, we have focussed on teachers and have not aimed to include students or to directly document their experiences. An evaluation project which would foreground the experiences and responses of students studying for the CGEA, is also needed.

3. METHODOLOGY

The implementation of the CGEA has been the subject of much controversy in the field, and the need for its evaluation was widely recognised. On June 24, 1994, the Adult Literacy Research Network Node (ALRNN) organised a seminar entitled **Evaluation as Research** and attended by about 80 people involved in ALBE. The morning session focussed on evaluation methodology and the afternoon session consisted of four workshops, one on each of the four streams of the CGEA, in which teachers shared their responses to it. The ALRNN circulated a leaflet at the seminar inviting participants to indicate their interest in becoming involved in a process of evaluating the CGEA.

Following the seminar, I was asked by Bev Campbell, co-ordinator of the ALRNN, to co-ordinate the project: to convene a group of participant-evaluators and to write a synthesis report for publication by the ALRNN. I was also asked to collate and write up the result of the four afternoon workshops (one for each stream of the CGEA) and these summaries of discussion form some of the data on which this report is based.

The participant evaluators (or 'working group') helped to plan the research process, generated much of the data and acted as a reference group in writing this report. The group comprised 13 members, including myself, 10 of whom had volunteered at the June seminar and two additional members whom I recruited to improve the representativeness of the group. (Five others had initially indicated their interest but withdrew or else contributed their views by interview instead.) The 12 members of the group were from four different TAFE colleges, three different community-based providers and the prison system.

At the initial meeting on August 19, the participants worked through the key issues involved in teaching to the CGEA and identified the following questions:

1. How does the competency framework affect my teaching program and teaching practice? (This was the key organising question.)

2. Is it possible to "go with the flow" (with a group or topic) then look back and retrospectively fit this around the requirements of the Certificate? To what extent do I do this?

3. What has driven me as a teacher? How do I hold onto that? Am I compromising myself?

4. What works? what doesn't?

5. Can I fulfill the assessment demands without compromising student needs?

6. How can I cope with teaching and assessing at the different levels, and the range within each level?

7. What do I do with learning outcomes defined in the Certificate that are ambiguous, or don't make sense, or that I disagree with?

8. What does the Certificate offer *me* as a teacher?

9. How do I cope with having ESL, literacy and disabled students who are being integrated, at the same time as teaching the Certificate?

10. What is the impact on students of the assessment?

11. In what ways have I been creative in testing/assessing students?

12. What are the administrative constraints (of moderation, etc)?

13. What is the impact on 'negotiating the curriculum'? Is my course driven by the needs of the learners or by the Certificate?

14. What are the significant outcomes which *are not* part of the framework?

There was discussion of the theoretical and ethical issues involved in undertaking participatory action research. The following material was distributed to participants:

- *What's the Use of Research?* (Nunan, 1993),
- *A Point by Point guide to Action Research for Teachers* (Henry, and Kemmis, 1985),
- *Keeping a Personal Professional Journal,* (Holly, 1987).

The participants undertook to keep reflective journals in which they would record what was happening in their teaching in the light of these key questions. In their journal entries, made during September, October and November 1994, they documented the changes, challenges, benefits and difficulties they experienced in working with the Certificate.

It was decided that whereas the journals themselves were to be private, each person would submit a report based on what they had written, summing up the issues as they experienced them and their overall reflections. The participants each received a small payment ($200) for this work. The 11 journal reports contributed by the 12 participants (including one joint report) are in the Appendix.

At the first meeting, it was decided that the group should be broadened so that the evaluation would be based on more widely representative feedback.

Accordingly, I recruited a second group of practitioners chosen on the basis of broadening the representation of different institutions, types of providers, geographical locations, streams, and in some cases on the basis of historical involvement as CGEA project workers or of their historical involvement in developing the VAEL-NAFF or the ABEAF framework. These participants were interviewed rather than being asked to keep reflective journals.

The data for this evaluation thus consists of the eleven journal reports, the tapes and transcripts of the 13 interviews and a number of related documents, including the report of the June 24 seminar, reports of rural seminars and project reports (some of which were in draft form). The documents that have been used or referred to in this report are listed in the bibliography.

The draft findings were negotiated with ten of the participants at the final meeting of the working group on November 18, 1994. There was general affirmation of the findings and some additions and changes were made. It was further presented at a forum of fifty people at the VALBEC conference on November 24, 1994, where the findings and recommendations were strongly affirmed.

The draft findings were presented and discussed at a meeting of the CGEA Monitoring and Evaluation Committee (on December 9) and used as one input for recommendations drafted by the committee to the Program Standing Committee of ACFEB for funding for a project to review and modify the current VAELLNAF.

4. FINDINGS

The benefits and difficulties that practitioners have experienced in implementing the CGEA and their developing critique are discussed under the following headings:

4.1. Institutional and environmental issues
4.2. Impact of the CGEA on teaching generally
4.3 Assessment
4.4 Reading and writing stream
4.5 Oral communication stream
4.6 Numeracy stream
4.7 General curriculum option stream
4.8 Moderation
4.9 Implementation

4.1 Institutional and Environmental issues

4.1.1 Bringing ALBE in from the margins

The accreditation of the CGEA is seen by some as bringing ALBE in from the margins and raising its profile by making it more coherent and ensuring a measure of public accountability to funding authorities. There is a recognition that accreditation will help ensure funding for ALBE provision from State and Commonwealth programs and in gaining resources for professional development. A few people expressed the view that greater public accountability is necessary and suggested that higher levels of scrutiny and accountability will lead to increased awareness and self-confidence of teachers.

> *... where I feel that there is great strength with this document, is that it is the spearhead for the changes that the sector is undergoing... I think what it can do is, at best, provide an opportunity for people to start to think about how they are going to move into the 90s and into the 2000s, and as a field, stand alongside of all the other things that are going to get a lot of funding and be able to talk the language (I.6.)* [2]

4.1.2 A credential and recognition for students

There was general consensus that it offers access to mainstream credentials and pathways for students, as well as official recognition and affirmation of their progress.

> *... it gives the student a credential, for all the time they have spent here (and we've been running courses for so long, and all they have got is a bit of paper that no-one recognises) (I.3.).*

4.1.3 Inadequate funding for moderation and professional development

DEET is currently the main source of funding for programs and it has been difficult to build in, with competitive tendering arrangements, sufficient resources for moderation and professional development. This has been especially true of rural areas and very small community-based providers that simply did not have the funding for travel time; at least one provider is planning to cease offering the CGEA for this rea-

son.

> *... rural isolation: difficulties of access to moderation sessions; no funds for travel...* (VALBEC, 1994).

> *We may drop awarding of Certificates to avoid cost involved with moderation/training etc, but will plan around the Framework and keep the spirit alive (I.2.).*

4.1.4 Funding by outcomes encourages 'creaming'

There is a perception that the trend towards funding programs according to demonstrable outcomes impinges on student selection and pedagogy - it creates a pressure to place students who are most likely to succeed, and to concentrate on getting results, as the main focus.

> *I think the level is going to be upped and upped all the time, because people have to have outcomes in 18 weeks, so if I think they can't do that in 18 weeks, they are going to take two years to get to that level,.. on choosing who you put into the program, you know you can get those outcomes, but what happens to the people who you know can't get them (I.5.)?*

4.1.5 Sessional staffing

There is a contradiction between the demands placed on teachers and the conditions of sessional staff; the level of skill, commitment, and extra time required to implement the Certificate cannot be expected from people being paid a minimum hourly rate.

> *Tutors need to be experienced, qualified teachers. Pay structure in ACFE is not sophisticated enough to attract and keep good people. There needs to be a scale. I am asking a top professional, at the moment, to work for $27 per hour, eight weeks per term (if the course runs and the funding holds) no holiday pay, no sick leave, etc. The Certificates are supposed to raise the standards, expectations, credibility, etc, of adult education for students but there has been no move to improve things for the tutors who have an increased work load and higher professional responsibility. Is it right to expect part-time and casual employees to implement a system that hasn't even been properly trialled (I.2.)*

> *Much of the work in implementing the CGEA has relied once more on the good will and voluntary time of those in the field (R.9).*

4.1.6 Pathways

Despite the initial aim of helping students into pathways to mainstream, there are still some areas of confusion: The CGEA does not clearly articulate into year 11. At a meeting of participants on November 18, an anecdote was related of VCE teachers exchanging pieces of student writing with CGEA teachers to informally compare levels. Two pieces of writing (assessed at CGEA level 3) were rated as an A and a B at VCE level by the VCE teacher, and writing that had been passed as a B in VCE had been assessed at level 3 in the CGEA. Some reading and writing elements appear to be more demanding than the equivalent standard of skills required at year 11 and 12. This is obviously an anomaly. There were other stories of students who have passed year 11, but have been assessed by ALBE teachers at about level 2. There was general agreement at that meeting that some of the performance criteria are unrealistically high, especially at levels 3 and 4.

4.1.7 Industry and workplace settings

There was feedback that the CGEA is not well understood by providers of industrial and vocational training. Employers are critical of its complexity and there are difficulties in applying it for mixed literacy and vocational course development (I.2., R.8.). When learning outcomes of the CGEA match the vocational outcomes it is useful, but there are only certain elements which match up with most vocational and industrial training courses (I.1.).

On the one hand, there has been feedback that the CGEA has been useful in workplace settings both as a curriculum development tool and as an assessment tool (ie, as a framework for describing literacy and numeracy levels across an industry and as for assessing the skill levels of clients) (I.1.). However, its use as a credential in workplace and industry settings seems more problematic. One workplace teacher commented on the problems of 'selling' the CGEA to industry, when industry is more interested in their own certificates: what is the value of a basic education credential to them (I.1.)?

The time constraints of workplace and industry courses make it difficult to plan, deliver and assess across all streams as well as addressing the demands of workplace training:

> *The time was a big factor with my workplace work... the managers wouldn't release them for a long period of time, so it was thirty or forty hours maximum per worker.* [Instead of the recommended 80 hours per stream per level - JS] *You can understand that they want them on the job so to try to work students through the eight competencies in one stream was very pressured and the thing that I noticed most was that I didn't have time to do any redrafting work. You know I'd get a first draft back and I'd ask them could you possibly redraft it and think about those things, but we just didn't have time in class and they were loathe to do any outside work so it was often first draft or slightly amended stuff (I.14).*

4.2 IMPACT OF THE CGEA ON TEACHING GENERALLY

Teachers discussed the impact of the CGEA on their teaching in balanced terms acknowledging benefits as well as difficulties:

The competency framework has affected my teaching in a positive way, in that it has made me more rigorous in covering the four domains, and also given me a dialogue and common ground with other teachers. It has also helped me to deconstruct my teaching processes and to be able to be more explicit about the genre of those processes... However, it has placed enormous pressure on me both administratively and for outcomes which I think impact negatively on my students (R.1.).

Certainly, there have been some positives that have come out of the CGEA, for example the necessity of moderation has forced teachers together and provided an invaluable opportunity for discussion and sharing. This must be continued and built on, as the need in the ALBE field for peer support and sharing is enormous... (but)... we need to come up with something more realistic and less restrictive... the Certificate stifles creativity and confidence and has the potential to remove students away from being the main focus of my teaching (R.2.).

I like the Framework as a curriculum organiser and I even like the elements because they do give you an idea of what the students should be able to do at the end, but like other people, I find the performance criteria are the things that are problematic. Just the process of assessing students, which we haven't had to do before, places a lot of strain on the teacher and on the students (I.12.).

Many of the participants have acknowledged in their reports and interviews, the importance of the ABEAF Framework as the basis of the VAELLNAF, which they have found useful for curriculum planning:

The ABEAF had already gained wide acceptance in developing greater structure and balance in our curriculum planning and helped us to move towards a common language and had a sound theoretical base and in itself took us well beyond the focussing on personal stories and to a more rigorous analysis of who the students are, what are the domains of social activity for which they may need to be prepared, what we are teaching them, and why. So its basis in the ABEAF must be acknowledged in so far as that common language of domains and levels has further taken root throughout the implementation of the CGEA (I.5.).

There has already been much discussion of the various flaws in the VAELLNAF document. Many noted that the language is inaccessible to students and teachers, somewhat intimidating and at times lacking in intelligibility. There is also reference to a lack of coherence in the document itself: in the wording of the performance criteria, in the way performance criteria relate to each other and to the elements, and also to some extent in the way that the streams relate to each other. A typical expression of the frustration experienced by many practitioners in struggling to implement the framework in its current form is this:

Given how confusing the document is I find this a terribly difficult situation. Similarly, an enormous amount of time has been spent trying to understand the performance criteria that are extremely convoluted and unworkable, only to have them changed into Agreed Variations. It has made me extremely suspicious of the value of using a certificate that is so flawed that it can't be implemented without

having to rewrite it... It seems to me that what we've been going through is a trialling of the Certificate only without the funding for a trial and under the pretence that we are just fine tuning a completed document (R.7.).

Many of the inconsistencies in the document have since been clarified by the 'agreed annotated variations' process and the production by ACFE of a simplified and more 'user-friendly' version of the competency statements and performance criteria (Lyons, 1994). However, according to the majority of participants, the requirements of criterion-referenced assessment (rather than the flaws and inconsistencies in the document) were seen to have the most negative impact on teachers' practice. This issue is documented in section 4.3. Possible approaches to resolving the issues are discussed in section 5 of this report.

4.2.1. An aid to developing 'good practice'

Many teachers commented that the framework facilitates a more rigorous approach to theoretical underpinnings, curriculum planning and delivery:

I think I am more rigorous in my attitude to my teaching, I think I spend a lot more time analysing students' work and how they are going,.. so now I analyse a piece of work much more carefully, in terms of what is wrong with this piece, not really totally in terms of the Certificate, I suppose it is the genre theory that I have taken over from the Certificate (I.5.).

So it made me think about how I teach things, what people do in certain styles of writing, what could I do to improve that writing, so it made me analyse that writing in a far more detailed way (R.4.).

A structure for courses, a help to planning, a guide for less experienced staff (VALBEC, 1994).

For me as a teacher, the CGEA framework has been very useful as a curriculum "map". If I use the metaphor of the map, it is as if I have been able to chart my teaching as it was before on the map, as well as to take some new uncharted roads. By that, I mean that my teaching has broadened to encompass more of a balance of the four domains. Unlike previously, my students are developing a language for analysing the purpose of a text (R.11.).

Having taught ABE for some years now, I must admit to my stockpile of "things that work" and "this is how I always teach" approaches. The CGEA has helped to clear away some of these cobwebs of habit. The demands of assessing 12 elements in Reading, Writing and Oracy at a level forced me to reorganise some of my planning and try to better integrate my classroom activities (R.9.).

Having the strands and attributes clearly defined is a great resource for a numeracy teacher and is a point of reference to ensure a full and varied program... (R.2.).

... and I think it's great that people are having to think about planning and are having to think about what it is they want to do over a 10 or 20 week course. Even if it is only 2 hours, I think it's high time that people did start talking the language of

process and outcome, not just process...(I.6).

A number of teachers are going beyond using the VAELLNAF as a planning framework and are succcessfully integrating the concept of the framework and the elements into their pedagogy:

> *I try to include the students and explain what I'm doing, and I give them the performance criteria and if they can't understand I explain it to them. They don't seem to be fazed by them... they don't know the complexity behind those performance criteria. From time to time I go through my records with them... they can see what areas they need to build up in order to get the full Certificate. They understand about the four domains, and they're very interested in debating whether this is a 'knowledge' or a 'public debate' text...(I.9).*

4.2.2 More curriculum guidance required

A number of participants noted, however, that there is inadequate guidance in terms of how to develop the curriculum itself:

> *I believe an awful lot of curriculum writing should have been done before we got into this. We probably put the cart before the horse when moderation happened before people were really trained in curriculum writing for it... I would have liked to have seen a lot of curriculum writing, a lot of professional development, and then for the curriculum to be moderated, so everyone could get together and see what everyone else is doing, to say whether it's going to fit the criteria (I.2.).*

Several commented that the concentration on the assessment has detracted from the issue of how they actually bring students to the outcomes specified:

> *Another criticism is that it tells you what the outcomes should be, but there is no guidance whatsoever, on how you get to those outcomes. There's no pedagogical guidance. Most curriculum documents have something about teaching, but this competency-based framework doesn't have anything about that, you can arrive at the competency in any way. That has its advantages if you are just looking at the credentials, ... but I think people, especially those who are not all that experienced, would like a bit more guidance from curriculum bodies... on how to teach. We don't get any more professional development on that sort of thing (I.9.).*

4.2.3 The benefits of moderation and professional development

There is a separate evaluation of moderation processes that has been carried out by Jeanette Johns and Clare Claydon. These findings should be seen in conjunction with the findings of that evaluation. (ACFEB, 1994b)

Feedback on moderation has included strongly positive and negative positions. However, the majority view of participants in this project was that moderation processes have had a key role in developing common understandings and a common language around issues of levels and assessment. Most reports acknowledged the positive role of moderation as a process of professional development. As one participant said in relation to moderation, 'professional development has never

been so good' (R.9.). Many commented on the increased sharing of ideas, confidence-building, networking and the process of building consensus and a common language in the field as important outcomes of moderation:

> *...the necessity of moderation has forced teachers together and provided an invaluable opportunity for discussion and sharing. This must be continued and built on, as the need in the ALBE field for peer support and sharing is enormous (R.2.).*

Issues of moderation are further discussed in section 6 of this report.

4.2.4 Pressures experienced in implementing the Certificate

Almost all participants referred in some way to the increased levels of pressure they felt that they and their centre had been put under in implementing the Certificate this year. This pressure can be seen as an inevitable part of the cultural change that the CGEA represents. For some, the stress experienced lessened as the year progressed and the language and requirements of the Certificate became better known. This often seemed to come about as teachers became more bold and creative in modifying and changing things according to their perceptions of best practice:

> *I find the Certificate quite restrictive to good teaching and unnecessarily bureaucratic but in the end the inventive pragmatist in me will find ways of minimizing the impact of accountability procedures and I will continue to utilize an extensive teaching repertoire developed over the years through critically reflective practice, to go on lighting fires in the imagination rather than filling buckets with busy work (R.6.).*

However, 'creative modification on the run' can bring its own set of stresses, when people are committed to the overall integrity of the Certificate. One of the stresses of creative modification was that there have been and still are different interpretations of the guidelines given by different people at different times. This has created an atmosphere of uncertainty and sometimes conflict.

A few participants saw the stress as a potentially positive part of change:

> *Teachers have been frightened by it. Maybe they feel that they are being tested or judged, because it really does put a lot onto the teachers' accountability, which I think is a positive thing but it has made some people feel unsure about their own abilities as a teacher which is really sad, because they are very good and experienced teachers... Other people have coped with it very well and found it to be positive and flexible, so we have the opposites (I.13).*

Quite a few teachers reported on how their attitudes towards the Certificate have changed over the course of the first year of full implementation. Having grasped the complexities of the framework, they were able to better appreciate the benefits of working with it:

> *I'll tell you one thing, I feel a lot more positive about the Certificate now than compared to the way I felt when I was right in the middle of it all last term, when it was all totally new to me. I can see a lot of good points in having such a certificate (I.14).*

4.2..5 The pressure on time

There is a large amount of documentation now required, with the preparation of complex assessment tasks, the cross-referencing of performance criteria, 'mapping over' between streams in integrated curricula, and the assessment and moderation requirements. The stress of additional work has been reported by most participants, but is acutely felt by sessional teachers who are donating hours of voluntary time in developing curricula and recording assessments. Several people commented on the amount of time spent on either debating the issues of competency-based training or of record-keeping, so that there is no longer time left for focussing on what and how we actually teach:

> *There's a lot of debate about issues which sometimes doesn't get anywhere. I think that it is good there is debate on issues, but because we are so busy debating these issues, and whether or not there should be competencies, we don't put our energy into helping each other expand our repertoire in teaching, and I feel even though I am an experienced teacher, I can always improve on what I did last week, I like that challenge, and I like sharing my ideas with other teachers and getting them to try things. But I feel there's less time for that, because we are spending more time on record-keeping (I.9).*

4.2.6 The requirements of the Foundation Certificate and the semester length course

The full Foundation Certificate entails the assessment of 19 different elements (Reading - 4, Writing - 4, Oracy - 4, Numeracy - 4, GCO - 3). Each of these has around 5 or 6 performance criteria that may each relate to different skill areas. The normal course of 18 hours per week for 20 weeks is often not long enough to complete the amount of work that this schedule of elements requires, particularly given the wide range of ability, educational level and language development that is present in any ALBE class. The notional 80 hours per stream is a guideline only; however it has at times put great pressure on teachers to adapt their normal processes to enable students to be awarded the Certificate within the amount of time specified.

In theory, the focus of the assessment could be on the awarding of single 'statements of attainment', rather than the full Certificate; however, 'a course' is generally associated with the gaining of 'a certificate', which has more significance in public discourse. Where the full Certificate is being offered, there is an implicit pressure to give at least some students the opportunity of acquiring it. This often means teaching 'to' the Certificate given the limited time available. This dilemma may be resolved in time, as teachers and students learn to consider the 'statement of attainment' as the basic unit of certification, rather than the Certificate itself.

4.2.7 Suitability for part-time courses

There was feedback from a few teachers of part-time (2, 4 or 6 hours per week) classes that the complex requirements were not compatible with part-time courses for students who wish to study for just a few hours per week, and who may not be interested in accreditation:

But with the two hour one, I just haven't put the pressure on myself. I gave them some assessments last term the last night, just a few simple reading and writing ones, and I didn't put pressure on people... I'm not going to worry because I think it's more important, adults come, especially evening class to help their sounds, their reading, their writing (I.14).

4.2.8 Pressures on students

There were quite divergent experiences reported in terms of pressure on students. Some teachers (particularly those working with an integrated model) reported that their students loved working with the Certificate, appreciated the additional structure, the knowledge of what was required and where they were going and valued the awarding of a credential for their achievement.

In general, the students are positive about the opportunity to work towards something more significant than just another short course certificate (R.8.).

A few reported that many students are not interested, and that it is often not sufficiently relevant to the specific skills that they are seeking to develop.

In my experience I have found the CGEA to be irrelevant for students... the course document is not compatible with the students' stated goals and/or their desired learning outcomes (R.3.).

It was common experience that, in any one classroom group, some wanted to do the Certificate and others were not interested. Teachers were able to assess only those who wanted to be assessed, and

... for those who did attain a module it was rewarding and presentation day really was very affirming and some of them were inspired - they were asking what's the next course (I.14).

A consistent theme, which requires further reflection and analysis, is the possibly inevitable effect of engendering a 'pass/fail mentality' amongst the students, which would 'infiltrate and undo some of the good work'(I.4.).

I make it subliminal, and/or you can demystify it, but it's still difficult, you still have to say whether people pass or fail basically and in our area we have been used to just pushing people along and extending them, whatever level they are at. We haven't had the divisions where we have to say, 'yes, you are on this side, or are on that side,' (we've just had that continuum) and I don't like that. On the other hand, the field has got bigger and we need to be able to communicate with providers... (I.9.).

For me, the negative thing has been student expectations. Students latch on to the idea that they want to get the Certificate and in level 4, they have got their heart set on getting that Certificate, but in actual fact the skills are incredibly high that they have to reach and some people take a lot longer than others to get there, and some want to do it in six months and not take a full year. I know the theory is that you can take your time to work through it but I think it causes problems (I.5.).

Given that the majority of students would come from a background of failure in school, it is particularly unfortunate that they are put into a pass/fail situation immediately upon their re-entry into ALBE. Perhaps this is an inevitable side-effect of assessment and credentialling. More research and analysis is needed on this issue.

One teacher raised the issue of what happens to students who do not have the opportunity to complete the Foundation Certificate in one course. Students may be moved by DEET from providers who offer the Certificate to providers who do not, so that the students go from doing something which was 'much more focussed' to 'a more or less general course'. On the other hand, they may be enrolled in courses which are funded on a 'one off' basis (such as in many workplace training courses) and hence have little opportunity to complete it (I.14).

As yet there has been no comprehensive evaluation of the students' experiences with the Certificate; the current evaluation project focuses on the experience of teachers principally. Further research and evaluation, ensuring that the students' voices are heard, is now required.

4.3 Issues of assessment

4.3.1 Perception that assessment is over-riding other considerations

One of the issues that many participants wrote or spoke of is the way in which the Certificate framework focuses attention on assessment rather than pedagogy or curriculum and hence distorts 'good practice'.

> *The document has created an unnecessary obsession with assessment. As soon as someone can do an activity or task there is a tendency to want to make sure that it is recorded for CGEA 'evidence'. (It wasn't so important that a student had successfully performed a certain skill but that it would somehow match the performance criteria.) There is this awful feeling of becoming obsessed with collecting samples of work. The nightmare associated with this is that it is impossible to fulfil the requirements of the frameworks without contriving the most unreal of tasks (R.2.).*

> *Assessment hangs over my head and that of the students. They need to know where they stand but this also neglects the joy of learning. The process does not take into account individual strengths and weaknesses (R.3.).*

> *The last thing I wanted to do was repeat the same confidence destroying activities with which the students had already experienced a history of failure. For that reason I began to incorporate the Certificate into my everyday teaching, the idea being that I would just observe people's development inconspicuously and jot down when they reached the competency. The problem with this is that every lesson had to fit the criteria of the Certificate for the work to go into someone's folio to enable them to access the Certificate. That led to activities that resulted in a piece of independent writing and a piece of independent reading... The students found producing*

these pieces of work patronising and useless (R.7.).

Assessment has become the focal point. Initial assessment, placement and RPL are the first hurdle, then formative, informal and assessment tasks, followed by exit assessment. We are going to be bogged down with assessment and this will drive everything (I.2.).

I see assessment tasks becoming the curriculum. An 'integrated course' is becoming one humungus assignment comprising multi assessment tasks - beautifully put together, interesting and efficient but there is little deviation from the all-important assessment! (I.2.).

The preoccupation with range and conditions may divert from the real business of teaching (R.5.).

One teacher referred to the process of 'rushing through' material that otherwise would have required more time spent on it, in order to meet performance criteria (I.4.). Several others commented that although moderation is successful and appreciated, the focus on the legalities of assessment amounts to a waste of professional development time when there are many other issues that need to be worked on jointly across providers.

4.3.2 Criterion-referenced assessment

The consensus emerging from this study is that the 'elements'[3] are useful as broad descriptors of milestones of student learning. However the requirement for the display of a fixed number of performance criteria, as the mode of assessing whether or not these milestones have been reached, has come in for much criticism. The criteria themselves are seen as sometimes bearing a tenuous relationship to the element and are not accepted as constituting exclusive and necessary conditions that that element has been achieved. Some of the performance criteria have already been 'scrapped' through the inter-regional moderation process of Annotated Agreed Variations; many teachers are modifying the criteria or simply ignoring those that they believe are not relevant.

The whole idea of denying someone a certificate because they don't fulfil one or two very narrow performance criteria really irks me (R.7.).

Well it was artificial, the whole setting up of these competencies and assessing people. I felt it was too guided and I never felt they could actually do what they would set them up to do (I.14).

Almost all the elements could stay intact... it's when you look at the performance criteria that it becomes horrific. So I give people a model of the actual elements, and I give the overall competencies, and I say, "this is what we teach and we're teaching these elements, so don't get hung up on these performance criteria"(I.5.).

I think a lot of practitioners have gone straight to the competencies and haven't made the theoretical link that is necessary, and that has become problematic, so now you have people teaching to performance criteria and narrowly defined elements of

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

that (I.5).

Some of the performance criteria, in a natural way, cannot be met, if we are following the document to the letter, so that you have to contrive the task to meet the performance criteria and teachers are saying that they refuse to do that, that they are adopting good adult learning principles, and do the holistic thing. If some performance criteria are not being met, they are documenting that and the reason why and they have found that there are gaps in the Certificate because things like resumes, business letters, cannot be included as assessment tasks because they do not meet the performance criteria (I.10.).

The elements and performance criteria are virtually impossible to meet and hence it is virtually impossible for students to be awarded the Certificate (especially in maths) (I.4.).

I have doubts about whether competency-based is the best thing for language because language is dynamic; it does change, it changes within communities and it's so complex that to adopt a competency-based approach where it is very 'tick the box' 'you have to do it this way, this way, this way'. I understand how it has transpired through the way it has been accredited and it seems that it is a pity that that's the only form of accreditation, in that it had to be written in those terms (I.10.).

(There has been) ...disbelief, especially with new people, that a task needs to reflect all the performance criteria. People find this extraordinary at first... then there is the next stage, which is "oh well, we will just get around it somehow"(I.1.).

Competency-based assessment does neglect the personal development aspect which is acknowledged in the Background Works as "traditionally an ALBE aim". The entry level of the student is neglected in the certification process and so does not reflect individual development. (It) does not take into account the point the person has come from and the learning the individual has done (R.3.).

(The ABEAF) wrote the performance criteria in a more flowing way, they were not numbered; they were indications, not criteria. But they then got turned into this terrible thing of being numbered. Rather than be taken as pointers, they got turned into necessary and sufficient conditions to be interpreted literally. You have to have all of them and if you have one missing you have got to fail them (I.7.).

Why can't the Certificate just be a way of allowing people to name their destinations and what the paths were that their students were going through? It wasn't intended to change people's practice much at all, except to make them aware of other possibilities that students may need. Now it has made it mandatory that you do it all, it is compulsory. At level 2 you are not allowed to specialise, yet at 3 and 4 you can just do oracy and get your Certificate. Why would anybody want to do that, unless it is for ESL (I.5.)?

Some teachers questioned whether competency-based assessment in fact was a guarantee of transferability of skills from one context to another:

...it's the same old thing. Just because you can do something in a structured situation, does it mean you can do it in real life? I have real doubts about that (I.14).

4.3.3 Fragmentation of teaching practice

There were some strong statements and a number of explicit examples given about the way in which the assessment framework affects and may distort good practice through fragmenting the curriculum and the processes of teaching and learning. A view expressed by several people was that whereas an experienced teacher will find ways around it, a less experienced teacher would be inclined to follow the lead of the document and tend to use the framework as a curriculum outline:

How to divide a curriculum into small 'chunks' whilst retaining its integrity is an issue which faces everyone teaching short-term students. The way in which the VAELLNAF is organised - into modules which are themselves composed of elements - encourages a simplistic carving up which runs contrary to good practice (R.10).

I find a fragmented approach to teaching creeps into my practice as I try to ensure that the integrity of the Certificate is maintained. The overall intention of the Certificate model is for students to demonstrate competency in participating in social life (according to the Background Works). However, in order for students to demonstrate competency in all the performance criteria the 'whole' must be broken into bits. Often this results in contrived and fragmented sessions (R.3.).

... inventing assessment tasks that are out of context with student growth and classroom dynamics and interests (R.5.).

People are opening the book and doing their whole curriculum according to how many assessment tasks they have to set in order to assess, not talking about it in order to allow students to show what they know. It is a major shift in what we do: in fact, testing,.. no flexibility in what you are testing as well. Everything is just seen in terms of the end product, which is a task that assesses people and that is a concern. People are jumping from assessment task to assessment task (I.3.).

The predetermined assessment framework goes against learner independence (R.3.).

The problem with the whole competency-based movement, if it's taken literally, is that it disenfranchises the best teachers. It says to them, "you are only allowed to use these explicit, verbalised criteria in this grid; you can no longer rely on the 20 years of experience you've had in assessing students' work". So rather than having a sort of dialectical or interactive process between the stated criteria and the experientially developed intuitions of the teacher, there has been an attempt to claim that the actual wording of the (criteria) is transparent and captures perfectly the grounds for judging student performance (I.7.).

Its narrowness... takes the edge off a broad educational approach... training rather than education (I.2,).

It puts a strain on good practice - does having timber and knowing how to use

hammer and nails add up to building a house (I.4.)?

(It) leads teachers to become "tickers of boxes". Whereas teachers will engage with students and say "yes, that's interesting", the need to fulfill predetermined criteria leads them to check these off, rather than think about that student's developing process of learning as a whole and to discover what is new and interesting in what she has done and what her particular problems are (I.7).

... but as verification gets closer then I am thinking, you should be tick, tick, ticking here, to make sure that they're covering everything, rather than designing a program in a class, and then saying, "oh yes, look they've done that and they've done that". So in that respect it's putting me in the position of, yes, I must become a ticker... I don't want to be a ticker (I.8.)!

4.3.4 Rigid seperation of the four domains

The separate assessment of elements in each domain, each with its own set of performance criteria, has the effect of regarding the domains as 'fixed' rather than as constructions that in real life always flow into one another and can't be clearly separated out. It is hard to find texts that fit neatly as examples of this or that domain. Some practitioners seemed to have solved this by means of creative interpretation and holding onto the 'spirit' rather than the letter of the law. For others, trying to work with the interface between the complex requirements of assessment and documentation and the complex texture of their practice (especially in reading, writing and oracy) seems impossibly daunting.

To me, the performance criteria stultify the domains. I know from the Background Works that each domain has traces of the others and that genres are always shifting and being subverted, and having those performance criteria is dangerous in that people are writing to a formula, rather than writing something that may go across two or three domains, and that the difficulties of assessing that might be stultifying good writing, just because not all the performance criteria are exhibited. My concern is that there could be a burgeoning of very rigid, formulaic texts coming out... students might adhere to all the performance criteria... but they lose the authenticity of texts (I.1.).

To avoid narrowing my focus I use texts, even in assessment tasks, if they do not fit all the range and conditions. More and more the challenge becomes a case of designing assessment tasks and selecting materials that allow students to develop the skills to demonstrate the performance criteria but that represent literacy in the real world... Shouldn't the CGEA reflect and value the literacy of the real world, and not the other way around (R.9.)?

Some commented that within each domain, the performance criteria themselves have the effect of limiting skills or text types:

That's one of the biggest problems I have with the CGEA, that within each domain, only one very very narrow area is focussed on for assessment - like Practical Purposes, the only thing you assess is instructions, yet in Practical Purposes, let-

ter-writing, CV writing, etc, should be part of it. It's even narrower in oracy and so I think people might just teach that very narrow competency... I've heard of people just whizzing them through very fast (I.12.).

The necessity to assess each domain separately within each stream was also questioned. Instead it was suggested that students be given more choice in working within the domains that were important to them and to use the framework as a way to help them to name their destinations. In the GCO (General Curriculum Option) there is an element of choice - why not in the rest of the Certificate? Whereas the framework implicitly broadens curriculum by the possibilities opened up by working across the four genres, it also limits it by enforcing an even spread across them through the form of assessment. This limits its appropriateness, for example in vocational and industrial settings and in other settings such as groups of women who are not seeking work, or for very low level students. In level 4 also, the appropriateness of the assessment in the knowledge domain has been criticised as reflecting a 'school-based' notion of literacy, rather than what students may need in work or social situations; at that level, it has been suggested that "people need to be able to choose the domains that they work in" (I.5.).

4.3.5 Complex 'mapping' required when working with an integrated model

There were a few (full-time) teachers who reported that they were teaching in a fully integrated way across all streams with successful outcomes - the extra work and time spent consulting with other teachers was worth it. The complexities of working across domains and streams has been overcome by some practitioners through concentrating on the content and identifying elements and assessment tasks in the material which flows from themes, activities and projects:

The theory was that the projects would bring it back to life, and you would see how it is, if you are going to do GCO with Reading and Writing, that there are certain criteria that overlap, and you don't have to do them again and again, if you integrate, so I'm wondering whether the feeling of compartmentalisation and aridity and artificiality ... that when you actually get into the meat of designing your own curriculum, can't be dissolved (I.6.).

Others talked of the huge amount of research and preparation required and the difficulty of finding texts that were authentic, appropriate and matched the criteria, range and conditions. The time needed to develop complex curricula which map over and incorporate all elements and criteria across the different competency frameworks (GCO, Numeracy, Oracy, Reading and Writing) was also an issue (I.2.).

A few said that the richness of teaching to the integrated model is circumscribed when it comes to applying the complex requirements of the assessment. One teacher described what happened after she had taken her class through a complex series of classroom activies around the theme of travel and the requirement for asssessment had to be addressed:

And then in term three, the reality of the assessment task became clear. One must do justice to what one's students have achieved in terms of competencies, levels,

moderation requirements, range and conditions. Down to earth we came, with something of a thud. The "spirit" of the CGEA was being documented, recorded, systematised, moderated and pulled into line (R.6.).

The complexities of assessing the integrated model are so great that the mapping process can result in curriculum which becomes contrived ("this goes with that") and interferes in the organic way in which themes tend to unfold and take on their own momentum:

With some of the stuff that has come out, they pick a theme, then they pick... "we'll do oracy and we'll do the four domains", and ... by the time you fit in maths and other things it becomes so contrived. A lot of the time you are doing an activity for the sake of an activity, not because its meaningful for the student or appropriate, because people say, "Oh, this fits into this! I've got to get all these things in here, this fits, OK, we're going to do this theme...(I.5.).

4.3.6. Difficulty of devising adequate assessment tasks

A number of participants reported feelings of anxiety about the difficulties of devising adequate assessment tasks and the criticism that they may be exposed to at moderation. Some people spoke of how this has impacted negatively on the professional self-esteem of teachers whose intuitive and experiential understandings in doing student assessments is now severely curtailed. One comment was that some people now felt paralysed unless everything was more and more narrowly defined and legalised. The view was put forward by a number of participants that the form of assessment effectively 'deprofessionalises' teachers in de-emphasising their professional judgement and prescribing a narrow framework of performance criteria, range and conditions against which student performance is to be assessed. A few participants spoke of feelings of guilt because students, as a result of the stringency of the performance criteria, range and conditions, may be unable to be awarded the Foundation Certificate; or guilt in knowing that "a piece of work had been let through knowing that performance criterion 5 of element 4.7 had not been met".

4.3.7 Conclusion

The complex and rigidly prescribed requirements of assessment by means of performance criteria do "present dilemmas in terms of teaching holistically"(I.4.). By far the main problem with the CGEA identified by the participants in this evaluation project is that the required form of assessment (criterion-referenced, 'behavioural' assessment) is pedagogically inappropriate. This suggests a radical simplification in the revision of the Certificate and a move to a more flexible and holistic form of assessment. As one teacher said, "we need something more realistic and less restrictive"(R.2.). This suggests that further research should be undertaken to explore ways in which the assessment framework should be modified to enable more flexible and holistic assessment processes to be used. The issue of performative competency-based assessment and the possibility of introducing more flexible and holistic alternatives in the revised version of the CGEA is discussed more fully in section 5 of this report.

In the following four sections, issues in relation to each of the four streams are addressed separately.

4.4 READING AND WRITING STREAMS

4.4.1 Separation of oracy from reading and writing

The pedagogical relationship between literacy and oracy is discussed in *Talking Curriculum*, the report of the ACFE-funded oracy professional development project, by Barbara Goulborn and Susan Manton (ALRNN, 1994c). The *Talking Curriculum* report contains valuable background material, analysis and curriculum guidance, and should be read in conjunction with this and the following section.

The separation of oracy from literacy, and the construction of 'oracy' (or, 'Oral Communication') as a separate stream, alongside 'Reading' and 'Writing' is seen by a number of people as problematic on the grounds that this separation implicitly goes against generally agreed notions of literacy as a form of social activity in different domains of life.

> *... the superimposition of the oral communication framework which straightway separated out cognition from language again. So now we have 'written language', 'spoken language' and 'content', as three separate objects of pedagogy and this means that written and spoken have to then be framed as forms or genres, as conduits of content... language has become completely disembedded from its context, or from the educational context. So, rather than having language across the curriculum, where language is integrated into actual engagement with a contextualised content, we are in fact going back to a reduced and abstracted form of language (I.7.).*

A number of people referred to the need to reintegrate oracy with reading and writing and the project entitled *Keeping it Together: Integrating Reading and Writing with Oral Communication* offered guidance on how this can be done. In fact most people are already teaching it in an integrated way but assessing it separately (ALRNN, 1994b).

4.4.2 CBT and the complexity of literacy development

Teachers involved in the Reading and Writing streams were particularly concerned that the complex interrelationship of factors affecting the acquisition and performance of reading and writing skills in an ALBE classroom is discounted by the application of a 'minimalist checklist' of criteria:

> *The complexities of the writing process are not always adequately recognised in a minimalist checklist of performance criteria. The performance criteria on their own cannot measure other important qualities of written texts such as the complex pre-writing decision, subtle variations in tone, use of language and analogy and creation of mood, the often multiple purposes of a test. There are problems associated with text-based criteria that are becoming more and more apparent (R.9.).*

> *I think we have to be critical of the whole competency system because of the way it does compartmentalise language. It's saying, in order to be competent, you have to display this set of skills and it doesn't allow for other factors that might influence that, such as gender, socio-cultural background, ethnographic aspects. So, whose competencies are they really (I.13)?*

In some cases teachers were faced with making assessment decisions about student writing which had met all the performance criteria as such but still did not work as effective texts:

> *Last month a student completed a 'Practical Purposes' text that met all the performance criteria of level 3. The student had designed a poster explaining new government regulations. It contained 'detailed factual information', 'technical knowledge' etc, yet it did not achieve its purpose which was to clearly inform the student population of the changes which would affect them. As a text it was not effective; yet it met all the performance criteria (R.9.).*

Some referred to the literacy (reading and writing) competencies as being "too narrow and too prescriptive" (VALBEC, 1994). Another view was that the framework does not allow for some areas (grammar, pronunciation, spelling, punctuation, purpose and audience, etc) that are particularly required by NESB students, to be dealt with fully (R.8.).

On the other hand, because of the rigidity of the performance criteria and the inability at present to make an integrated judgement about individual students, there are always groups that may be made to fail because of a particular short-coming:

> *Another problem is that individual students will be at different levels in each of the four domains (R.7.).*

> *I think with language it's especially difficult to assess, with any kind of language, and it's got particular kinds of problems in relation to the CGEA. A particular one is people who meet all the criteria except for grammar and spelling ones and the grammar one is solely because they are second language speakers. Yet there are other ones who can spell and can use standard grammar and so on, who can't produce the sort of texts that each element is asking for. There's that variation. The performance criteria are not flexible enough, and I don't know if they ever could be (I.9.).*

> *I think it boils down to the task, the sort of text that you give them to produce, moving away from the abstract to the concrete, speech-like, to written like. What is problematic is the cut-off points. I think they are inherently problematic in assessing language (I.9.).*

4.4.3 Limitations on Text Types

A few participants referred to the tendency, in devising texts that will fit in with prescribed levels, criteria, range and conditions, to oversimplify and therefore to patronise students and to deprive them of authentic material.

> *A constant source of frustration to me is the range and conditions that are written for texts at level 2... I have discovered that The Age, Herald Sun and magazines and brochures are not using the same criteria in their production of texts. ...Students stand to be disadvantaged because of restrictions and limitations that are formally put on them as learners, and on me as facilitator of their learning, as*

to the type of texts that are seen to be legitimate for them. ...I refuse to allow students to be shielded, removed and protected from hard words, complex sentences, complex arguments that are part of their daily lives and discourses (and certainly part of the texts on television) and to insult them with simple sentences and simple debates, which is largely what the range and conditions of level 2 demand. ...Where does this leave me? Inventing assessment tasks which are out of context with student growth and classroom dynamics and interests (R.5.)?

...if independent performances are required to exit level 1 then I think we are stuck with a contradiction that can't be worked around. In my experiences with this group over a period of time I have found that students require a certain amount of teacher support for almost all of their activities. When they have this level of support then I think that they are capable of dealing with much more text than is prescribed by the Certificate. I found through my teaching that it is extremely difficult to find authentic texts that are made up of only 1 - 2 sentences. It is almost as though level one of the Certificate has given birth to its own genre, the two sentence narrative (R.7.).

In the past, teachers used (with level 1 students) all sorts of quite complex texts which the teacher read aloud and the students followed. The problem is that level 1 readers and writers are not level 1 thinkers. They are able to handle difficult texts and answer quite complex comprehension questions based on text that has been read to them by the teacher, or that has been read with the assistance of the teacher, or that has been read in a group of students all helping each other out or which has been played to them from a tape recorder. Students are also able to write quite complex texts by getting the teacher to scribe, by working collectively with other students and by sending pieces back and forth for teacher direction. Being able to do these things, to me, is a more significant achievement and use of time than being able to independently read two sentences or independently write two sentences which by their very size are unlikely to be socially powerful or relevant. (R.7.).

The idea in the Certificate that at level 1 you can read and write two sentences, at level 2 you can read and write a short paragraph and at level 3 you can read and write three to four paragraphs (and so on) seems to me to miss the point that literacy is about more than a very strict definition of independent reading and independent writing. I have come to this conclusion with my own group, after a period of teaching based on reduced texts and asking the students to independently have a go at writing one to two sentences on a given topic. It got to the stage where students were rarely reading authentic texts and the writing they were doing seemed overly simplistic and worthless to them (R.7).

4.4.4 ABEAF Framework (Background Works)

Despite these issues, there seemed to be fewer problems with the Reading and Writing streams than with the other streams. Quite a few people said that the CGEA (despite the assessment issues) does provide a rigorous and theoretically rich framework for analysis of the students' needs and the development of curriculum in Reading and Writing, acknowledged the original ABEAF framework (now the Background Works) as the basis of this. Practitioners had been widely consulted in the development of the ABEAF Reading and Writing framework and there had been a series of professional development workshops so that the 'skeleton' of the CGEA

framework, as it relates to Reading and Writing had already gained a degree of acceptance in the field. A number of people specifically expressed their appreciation of the work of Delia Bradshaw and Rob McCormack in developing the ABEAF framework. A frequent suggestion was that the revision should retain this framework with a simplified and more flexible means of assessment.

4.5 Oral Communication

The Oral Communication stream has been perhaps the most challenging and the most problematic of the four streams of the Certificate. The scope of this report does not allow for a full analysis of these issues. The project report of the Oral Communication Project, *Talking Curriculum* (Goulburn and Manton, 1995) contains a detailed discussion of the issues as well as an analysis and explication of the theoretical basis for developing the competence statements in the oracy stream. The report also includes advice, lists of activities and case studies of how teachers have taught the Oral Communication stream.

It is evident from the reports of the two oracy projects (Brearley, 1994b; Goulburn and Manton, 1995) that, despite the difficulties and the change of focus represented by the Oral Communication stream, teachers are teaching it and are doing so with integrity and innovation. For some this has meant simply adding a new layer of assessment onto the kinds of activities that they would have done in the course of general literacy; for others, the requirements have led them to explore new and productive activities to develop oral communication skills. With integrated programs the oracy stream has been used in conjunction with GCO as part of Reading and Writing or in the development and assessment of activities arranged in themes. However there are problems:

> *The oracy stream has been quite problematic; people wonder how best they can present tasks for oracy. Do you contrive one that you then record? Is there a natural way to assess oracy or should it be an on-going and continuous thing that you strive for in your class, that you as a teacher make objective (I.10.)?*

Some teachers have found the public debate elements useful, as a framework in expanding skills of discussion, listening and debate, and the knowledge elements useful in developing presentation and public speaking skills. Oral communication has always been regarded as an important component in literacy. The problem many people are finding now is that of assessing oral communication by means of a framework of performance criteria, range and conditions. At this stage there is a lack of acceptance within the field of the need for a separately assessed Oral Communication stream.

4.5.1 Separation of Oracy from Literacy

> *I just see oracy as part of reading and writing, so I don't teach it separately. I don't think, in oracy for self-expression, I have any right to assess people's casual conversation in any way, so I chuck that one out (I.5.).*

A few participants expressed doubts about the oral communication stream on the

grounds that the theoretical and pedagogical issues involved in teaching Oral Communication directly have not been sufficiently addressed.

> *If you take one of the distinctions between writing and speech, it is that writing is composed and deliberate, and is therefore quite shallow in its grammar, and not very expressive. The point about speech is that it is spontaneous; it's so complex in its grammar, it's intuitive. To make people conscious of their speech is a serious issue. Much more intrusive than to teach people to write (I.7.).*

On the other hand, some teachers have found that there are advantages to having a separate oral communication stream because it can encompass some important communication skills (interviewing, public speaking, phone technique, etc) and because in some cases it takes pressure off students whose reading and writing is very low.

> *You can do oracy more consciously in a separate class, that is the good thing about having a separate oracy stream, also the students see it as something worthwhile doing if it's separate... When I introduce my level 2 class to the CGEA... there are students who don't see the point. Having it separate makes it seem like something worthwhile doing, rather than just chatting and getting off the point in Reading and Writing. There were some chaps in level 1 who could only write their name. In a separate oracy class it worked incredibly well, because these guys didn't have to worry too much about reading and writing skills that they felt bad about. It had a job-seeking focus, so they taught them a lot of interview skills for an interview. As a result of this class, the guy learnt to take over the interview and used the techniques he had learned in the oracy and he said, would you mind showing me around the factory ... he learned to take control (I.12.).*

Nonetheless, the Oral Communication stream is being taught in an integrated way with the Reading and Writing streams by the majority of teachers, as has been revealed by the Oral Communication project reports. Does the advantage of teaching and assessing oral communication in conjunction with other streams outweigh the disadvantage of adding on of a further layer of complexity in 'mapping' the oral communication elements over the reading and writing or GCO elements?

4.5.2 Theoretical basis not well understood

The Oral Communication stream uses the four domains in terms of four different kinds of speech episodes - social episodes (self-expression), support episodes (practical purposes), presentation episodes (knowledge) and exploratory episodes (public debate). The elements are developed around the notion of 'speech episodes' constructed as either transactional and interactional, relatively structured or relatively unstructured, monologic or dialogic. The performance criteria are further derived by the application of the concept of 'strands' of competence; defined in the Reading and Writing framework in terms of increasing complexity and increasing levels of skill. In Oral Communication the five strands are 'subject matter', 'tone, 'language', 'shape' and 'as listener'. It appears that this framework is not well understood or accepted as a useful framework for the assessment of skills in oral communication. A few people saw this framework as a narrow interpretation of the significance of oral communication in the process of developing literacy overall:

There is a body of linguistic theory which points to the primacy of oracy in the learning process, as a skill which is integral to the development of literacy in the broadest sense. There are no agreed benchmarks for oral competence as a social communication skill. The Certificate offers a particular view of oral competence, which does not necessarily preclude a broader perspective on what we mean by 'oral competence' but it does detract attention from the functional place of oracy in the acquisition of knowledge and the thought processing necessary for literacy acquisition. Oral competence must include the ability to use spoken language as a cognitive process in conceptual development (R.6.).

4.5.3. How, or what, to assess?

A number of participants have strongly resisted the assessment of oral communication, especially in the self-expression domain. As one participant asked, how does one teach or assess 'chat'? The framework of developing oral communication skills has not been derived from educational experience and there is no evidence that students progress consistently across the strands and domains, or even that the elements and performance criteria can be explicitly taught at all. To what extent are teachers being asked to assess attributes that students already bring to the class? To what extent are we actually able to teach those skills described in the elements and performance criteria in a classroom situation? Should we be assessing oracy at levels 1 and 2 at all? Why should native speakers of English have to have their oral communications skills assessed at all?

I just don't think (the oracy stream) should be there, and I don't think it should be assessed for ESB (English Speaking Background) people, particularly at levels 1 and 2... they already have a lack of skills in their everyday life, which they have to go through with, and this is something on top of that... it's absolutely outrageous, I think (I.5.).

The self-expression one is stupid... I don't see the point of it...
...I have given everybody a tick in the box, I haven't given any assessment tasks, because as soon as you make an assessment task for self-expression it's no longer self-expression, so I've given a tick in the box on the basis of a chat in the class, etc. You can do some teaching around that area by making people conscious about what they do... eg, write down the times that people chat about the weather. We can teach an awareness of self-expression but not directly teach casual conversion (I.12.) .

4.5.4. The CGEA in relation to ESB and NESB learners

There are problems in the usage of the CGEA in relation to both ESB and NESB learners. It is clear that quite a lot of providers are using the CGEA and particularly the oral development stream for NESB students, in some cases, in place of ESL ("the push is now on that this is now a document for ESL as well" I.5.). This is problematic; the theoretical framework is not one of second language acquisition and the Certificate was not planned as an ESL curriculum framework:

It doesn't cover the language competencies that you want o work with and you find you are sort of constantly trying to squeeze in language, but in fact it's such a comprehensive large framework there isn't really room for the language (I.14.).

The intelligibility criterion[4] was criticised as being a potential source of discrimination of non-native speakers. Is the acceptance of standard (Anglo-Australian) English as the benchmark fair in the context of multicultural Australia?.

> *A lot of people have been frustrated by the oracy stream because they feel that the performance criteria are unfair. For example, "makes reasonable demands on the listener". Now, who is 'the listener' here? As teachers we can understand things quite well but the man in the street might not. So what does that mean for the ESL student in their communication. Are we saying that they are not communicating well, when in actual fact they probably are, but it doesn't really acknowledge that the communication is a two-way thing, and the listener has to put herself into that process (I.13).*

4.5.5 Conclusion

The responses documented in this section indicate that more research and consultation is needed on the Oral Communication stream. There are many questions that need to be examined, for example: whether or not the four domains are a useful basis for the kinds of oral communication skills that are appropriate to teach; whether such a single framework can handle the relationship between ESB and NESB language and literacy development needs (Lyons, 1994); how we define 'oral communication'; what the pedagogical processes are in developing it; how assessment can be fitted around these processes; and whether or not the problems in trying to assessing oral communication separately outweigh the educational benefits. The two oral communication project reports (mentioned earlier) examine these questions and suggest a range of educationally creative approaches to addressing the dilemmas.

4.6 Numeracy

Feedback on the numeracy framework has been mixed: one teacher found the framework to be a useful guide to planning and assessment and a means of facilitating holistic and innovative best practice, especially in teaching in an integrated model across all streams:

> *The competency framework has changed my teaching for the better through facilitating a thematic approach which I am able to develop in tandem with the literacy teacher (R.4.).*

Others have found it puts limits on content areas and constrains good teaching practice. Many of the performance criteria have been criticised as "vague and unworkable" and a number of suggestions have been made as to how these could be improved and developed. The majority view appears to be that there are substantial issues that need to be addressed in a revision of the CGEA.

> *The numeracy section of the document is, I believe, unusable in its present form. At its best, it cramps a natural 'good practice' approach to numeracy teaching and allows for only the most contrived of assessment tasks if one is to attempt to match all the performance criteria to each element (R.2.).*

The following summary of issues presented is based on the conclusions of the June 24 Evaluation as Research workshop (ALRNN, 1994a) as well as the journal reports (R.2., R.4., R.8.) and interviews (I.3., I.4., I.11., I.14.) with teachers involved in the present project.

4.6.1 All criteria applied to all elements

The descriptions of the elements, the performance criteria and the domains at each level have been truncated, in comparison with the other streams. In the numeracy part of the VAELLNAF there is only one page to describe the competence level and performance criteria, compared with four for the others. As all criteria are supposed to serve all four elements, this is another source of confusion and difficulty.

> *There is only one page for each level so each page tries to encapsulate all of level two numeracy with five elements and one set of performance criteria. These criteria are somehow supposed to serve all the elements. In literacy you have each element with a separate set of performance criteria* (ALRNN, 1994b)

4.6.2 Atomisation of the curriculum

As with the other three streams, "cutting up the curriculum into elements and performance criteria" often goes against pedagogical best practice addressing the skills in a social context. The sum of the parts does not necessarily equal the whole. Performance of the elements and criteria as listed may not mean that the overall competency has been achieved.

> *My view is that it's very hard to cut up mathematics. The analogy that I use is that I know how to saw timber and hammer nails, but I don't really know if I could build a house. I think that breaking up the course (has to be done) to measure how people are going, but I'm not sure if this is the best way to do it (I.4).*

Teachers are now constrained in the extent to which they are able to follow up students' interests and follow through on a skill area because they are obliged to cover all skills equally at each level.

> *People are (now) locked into the fact that they have a time limit, and sometimes in maths you get a group of students who want to do everything in there, but they don't understand the basic concepts, they don't understand fractions, so you might spend eight weeks on fractions. At the end of the program, the students will be really pleased with the program they have done, because they have accomplished something that has bugged them for their whole lives. But now you can't do that, and you can't pick up all the incidental stuff, like one of the teachers was saying the other day, she had been doing basic percentage stuff, and now she wanted to move onto measurement, and the students didn't want to move on to measurement, They wanted to move onto the next step in percentage, which is how you would have previously taught it. You don't teach adults a fragment of it and then come back to them next year and teach them the next fragment (I.3.).*

4.6.3 Mismatch between skill levels of students across streams

Classes are usually grouped according to their writing ability rather than their Numeracy ability. In level 4 classes there are some people who probably don't

quite make level 2 mathematics and are therefore unable to be given Certificates at level 4 for Reading and Writing. Some higher level Reading and Writing students who require Numeracy teaching at the lower level may therefore miss out because of the problem of timetabling. This mismatch of students' levels between Numeracy and Reading and Writing has also been experienced at level 2: students may be "kept down" from gaining Certificates when they have achieved well in all the other streams (I.4.).

4.6.4 The pressure to "push on" goes against experiential learning

Good practice in the teaching of Numeracy "tends to swallow up the time". "For example, learning by discovery tends to go by the board. Especially in levels 3 and 4, there is a lot to fit in with the nominal 80 hours"(I.4.).

> *In the past we tried to get students to a certain level, without the rigidity that's been built into the Certificate, and you could probably afford to spend more time on one thing, so that if students were struggling along, give them some extra work out of a lesson, to try and give them more chance to grasp what's happening. This year I'm finding that there are these elements that have to be met, because of the performance criteria. I am finding, that especially towards the end of the semester, I am not doing justice to a particular thing. I might be rushing through, in two or three lessons, something I might have spent two or three weeks on in the previous year, just trying to get parts of the Certificate covered, so that the students have a fair chance of becoming competent in that particular thing... I think it puts pressure on the teacher, but then puts more pressure onto the student. I imagine that the teachers have got the skills to cope with that, but for the student, if they are being rushed through their work, it is going against a lot of good practice (I.4.).*

The effect of the Certificate in engendering a 'pass/fail' attitude also came up in the maths stream (I.4.). The requirements put pressure on the teacher, but even more so on the students.

4.6.5 Essential elements omitted

The elements as presently described limit the scope of the course. Many aspects considered essential by numeracy teachers have been left out, for example, there is not enough on measurement or number work (I.4., R.4.). At level 4 there is lots of work on parabolas, graphs and equations, but in real life (and for vocational work) this is not necessary. On the other hand, there should be more "bread and butter" skills as they relate to vocational areas: basic calculator skills, estimation and validation skills and basic book keeping skills (R.4.). There are short-comings too if it is to prepare students for Year 11 (I.4.). The numeracy stream is caught in a 'double bind' in attempting to provide both basic maths for further education (years 11 and 12) and numeracy for industrial purposes or further vocational training.

4.6.6 Conclusion

The numeracy stream needs to be redeveloped: preferably by a team of numeracy teachers who have had the experience with working with the existing framework. One participant said,

> *The Background Works are my lifeline and I would like to see these, along with the*

other positives I have mentioned, combined with some creative and ALBE type thinking to reconstruct the numeracy section of the CGEA into a realistic, workable and enjoyable document (R.2.).

4.7 General Curriculum Option (GCO)

Assessment for the GCO requires display of competence in any 3 of the 7 Mayer competencies, which have been expanded from the original three levels of developing competence to four levels, to be compatible with the VAELLNAF. The Mayer competencies (and the performance criteria that have been described at each of the four levels) reflect a broader and more generic notion of competency, than that which is evident in the other three streams. Being described at a high level of abstraction, they are able to be interpreted much more flexibly than those in the other streams.

The advantage is that there is greater flexibility and an opportunity to use the GCO framework for developing new curriculum to meet a diverse range of needs and interests. Providers have made use of it to fund and accredit a number of different sorts of offerings - including vocational content areas and creative arts activities. Others are using the competencies as a way of developing their teaching around group processes and to work more consciously at developing the generic competencies as they follow through themes. The curriculum development project report, *Exploring the Options* (ACFEB 1995) documents a number of curriculum case studies that have built on the GCO framework in health and lifestyle, science, social history, creative arts, legal studies, horticulture and as "tasters' in vocational areas.

However, as with the three other streams, there are a number of problematic areas in relation to the GCO that teachers have commented on.

4.7.1 Dilemmas of assessment

The (GCO) competencies have encouraged innovation and flexibility which is so valuable in a neighbourhood house, because those competencies are so useful. Although it's been the catalyst for some terrific stuff, I'm glad that I'm not a teacher in having to document the assessment tasks in a way that I would feel comfortable with (I.10.).

There is a set of inherent contradictions and problems associated with the GCO; the one most frequently cited is the fact that there is no way to assess the content of the general offerings that were to be accredited by means of the GCO. How can one assess Australian history, or women's health, or even vocational skill areas, against a set of such abstract and generalised competency statements relating to cognitive or group processes? Should the students' understanding of the content be assessed at all? Does 'problem solving' have any common meaning when applied to different contexts?[5].

There is no way, even in Mayer, to know whether a chef ordering vegetables from

the market, is a level 2 comparable to a computer student, constructing a data base. The only way to know whether they are comparable, is over about 20 years, where we find out empirically that it takes students of comparable competence about the same amount of time and attention to learn to do them both (I.7.).

On the other hand, we need to ask whether students' understandings of the specific content or their subject-specific skills need to be assessed at all in ALBE? Is the assessment of generic skills the best compromise we can have, given that it would be impossible to have a measure of assessment that correlates the wide range of subjects, skills and themes that can be taught within the GCO?

4.7.2. Maps over 'good practice' in all streams

In fact, the GCO "maps over good practice in all the streams" and it seems that many providers are going for an integrated model, recognising that the social, analytic, organisational, technical and communicative skills described by the Mayer competencies are in fact developed by means of sound teaching practice in any educational setting. The GCO framework can therefore be used to acknowledge and legitimate what is already happening. This has given some teachers the easy way out in some instances, by saying, "of course people do all of those things in our class" and automatically accrediting students with the GCO elements.

I know that the (GCO) was set up so you could accredit a whole range of different things, but they are really just process stuff that happens in the class anyway... it depends on how you structure projects etc (I.5.).

In one provider, teachers across all streams consulted with each other as to whether or not the competencies would be awarded without any particular curriculum being taught. This practice may undermine the original 'raison d'etre' of accrediting and offering knowledge-based subjects as part of ALBE. For people wanting to use the CGEA as a springboard into VCE, the process competencies may not be appropriate. There is a paradox here; on the one hand there is no way that the range of knowledge and skills that can now be taught as part of ALBE, *can* be fairly assessed on a common framework, but on the other hand, having a common framework based on process skills has facilitated and legitimated a proliferation of learning opportunities that otherwise may not have come about.

4.7.3. Generic skills and attributes already possessed by functioning adults

Some participants have commented that many of the Mayer competencies, especially at levels 1 and 2, are trivial, in comparison with what the adults are clearly already doing in their work and social lives. Can we give RPL on the basis of what we already know about their lives?

If someone is paying off a mortgage and doing these things in their daily lives and we know that they are functioning in the wide world with children and have kept down jobs, we know that they are more than likely to be demonstrating GCO level 2, so why is it that we need to create new tasks, in order to validate that? As someone else said, it's insulting to ask an adult, "show me how you can organise an activity"(I.6.).

4.8 MODERATION

This section of the report should be considered in conjunction with the evaluation of moderation processes that was carried out under the auspices of ACFE during 1994 (the 'Inter-regional Moderation Project').

The majority view of participants in this evaluation process is that moderation has been very useful in developing common understandings and a common language around the assessment of the CGEA. Most participants have acknowledged the positive role of moderation as professional development. Moderation has succeeded as a process of professional sharing of issues, networking with colleagues and building a common language in the field (as well as building consensus about problems within the CGEA).

Some other issues have also emerged:

4.8.1 Cost of Moderation

Not all providers have been able to afford the recommended two hours per tutor per stream per semester. Travelling time and costs are not allowed for, disadvantaging isolated and rural providers. With competitive tendering for DEET programs, those building in moderation costs may be disadvantaging themselves in relation to other providers who are not offering the Certificate (I.13).

4.8.2 Personal stresses

Some people reported negative experiences, hurt feelings, competitiveness and conflict breaking out at moderation meetings and that these stresses lead them to teach artificially to 'the perfect' assessment task in order to fulfil requirements.

> *I have found many of the moderation sessions that I detailed in the journal were quite negative and I often found it extremely difficult not to take it personally when my students work was assessed as not quite at competency standard (R.7.).*

As already discussed, others found moderation to be "positive and flexible" (I.13).

4.8.3 'Rubber stamping' and 'creeping standards'

There is a temptation to take 'the best' rather than a piece which is borderline. This leads to a group 'rubber-stamping' rather than critically discussing the tricky issues and cases. As one person said, the tendency for teachers to produce the most exemplary pieces could lead to a problem of 'creeping standards'.

> *We have to be careful that we don't get creeping standards. There is always that danger, the last time when you look at (another teacher's) task, that task seemed a little better than mine, so I might be trying to take along a slightly harder task next time (I.4).*

4.8.4. Validity and reliability?

One teacher questioned how valid or reliable moderation is, if only one piece per teacher needs to be taken. We know nothing of the judgements that teacher may make in relation to all her other assessments. Another questioned what is actually

meant by 'level 2', or 'level 3'? How are these judgements actually made?

> *Here I am assessing three people, level 2 people, and they are performing at what I think is level 3, and I begin to think, what really is the difference; the more I think about it the less I really know. I think there is a lot of conflict out there, as to what is assessed as level 2 in one area and level 3 in another area. There is always a range within the performance criteria at each level, but I think that people's judgements are different in different areas. I mean people are still playing around with it all, especially when people get to the grammar and spelling, but it's very subjective, the judgements that people make (I.9.).*

4.8.5. Areas of confusion

There are areas of continuing uncertainty with respect to moderation. One is the actual focus of moderation: is the judgement to be made in respect to whether or not the elements as a whole have been displayed at a particular level, or whether the performance criteria (the range and conditions) have each been fulfilled separately to an agreed level of competence?

> *We weren't really worrying so much about the performance criteria; the main worry was [whether the work was at] level 2, level 3, and so on. If you try to address all of the performance criteria and all the elements you could make a real straight jacket for yourself (I.4).*

> *Recently I attended a moderation session where [teachers] brought along samples of student work at level 2 to be moderated and verified. I took along samples of responses to readings and student writing which I had, in the classroom context, celebrated in a big way. I felt the students were beginning to be critical, to be brave, to be adventurous. They told me I could take their work. They were proud that it was going to be looked at by other teachers because I felt they were good examples of their developing abilities. Up until this point, I had been desperately pouring over performance criteria and was pretty well convinced that these had been met. The discussion around the table did not centre on the performance criteria but on the range and conditions, because, as they did not believe it met the range and conditions of a level 2 text, the whole exercise was virtually disqualified (R.5.).*

Another uncertainty is the extent to which one can go in interpreting 'the spirit' of the document. What is the degree of latitude of teachers' professional judgement? Should a first or fourth draft be taken to moderation? Should all performance criteria have to be displayed in the one task, or over many? What constitutes a task? Could it be a series of related tasks? There are different understandings of this in different regions?

In some instances a student's work may not fit the criteria but is judged by the moderating group to be competent anyway:

> *Students who might be able to write something that really expresses what they are trying to say very clearly, but they might not have fulfilled the criteria as specified, but it's obvious they can do what they are supposed to be doing... (I.14).*

The converse case is that of pieces of work that fulfilled the formal criteria but in fact were not effective as pieces of text that were meant to communicate a particular purpose (I.14., R.9.).

Ethical issues of student confidentiality at moderation sessions have also not yet been adequately addressed.

4.8.6 Conclusion

Despite the issues raised in this section, moderation as a whole is regarded positively by most participants:

> *For the majority of teachers it has been extremely positive... by far the most important point is the professional development aspect, in the sharing of what they are doing with their students and confidence building... an affirmation that they are really doing a good job for their students and are on track (I.10).*

The continuation of moderation will be vital in any revised form of the CGEA.

4.9. Implementation

Many participants expressed frustration in relation to what they perceived as shortcomings in the processes of implementation. These criticisms generally took into consideration the historical circumstances that resulted in the rushed process of gaining accreditation. Many commented that more consultation should have been carried out before the VAELLNAF was finalised and that a limited pilot should have taken place before it was fully offered. One provider had in fact done a 'trial run' during 1994 in order to give the teachers a chance to get to know the VAELLNAF in preparation for offering it fully (I.13.).

The main issues relating to the implementation process that have arisen in this project are summarised in the following section.

4.9.1 Timing and Sequencing

Moderation guidelines and the Assessment Kit came out well after teaching had begun so that people were working from a lack of knowledge of what is required. This has led to an undermining of confidence. Curriculum development and support was needed at an earlier stage.

Dissemination of information has been too slow and industry has not been sufficiently included. However, a number of people expressed appreciation of the 'CGEA Hot Line' service, the Information Sheets produced by ARIS (ARIS, (1994 - 5) and the CGEA Assessment Kit (ACFEB, 1994c) and other projects supporting implementation.

4.9.2 Implementation through projects

Implementation through projects has been fragmented and there has been a lack of central direction or responsibility for the implementation of the CGEA overall. Projects overlap and have been of an uneven standard; some have not yet been published.

4.9.3 Annotated Agreed Variations process

There is general agreement that the Certificate document is a 'flawed document'. The process of Annotated Agreed Variations (AAVs) through inter-regional moderation has been a method by which certain performance criteria have been simplified, reworded or scrapped altogether. However, this process was criticised by some participants and described by one as "chipping away at the edges": too slow, inadequate in terms of the overall review of the document that is required and having no official status. It would be important for the revision of VAELLNAF to take into account the revisions that have already been made through the AAV process.

4.9.4. Need for a standard format and image for the Certificate and statements of attainment

There is concern about how a 'provider produced' certificate will win recognition in any other place, particularly when produced by small community-based providers, as against large TAFE colleges. There is a feeling that the actual certificate should come from ACFE, and have a uniform image Statewide or else it won't be taken so seriously. Having a proliferation of locally produced certificates (which all look different) is seen to undermine the value of the Certificate as an accreditation. It seems out of keeping with the extensive processes of moderation and verification that aim to ensure the validity and reliability of the Statewide credential (I.8.) [6].

4.9.5. Recognition of prior learning procedures

Whereas RPL is implicit in determining students' commencement level, there are no official processes for acknowledging RPL. There is one example of the student who goes straight into level 3 or 4 classes and cannot be given RPL for the Foundation Certificate if she has not actually done the numeracy assessment. There is also a need to give RPL (officially) for some of the Mayer competencies to people who, by the way they operate their lives and manage families, are obviously demonstrating those competencies.

4.9.6 TAFE procedures

Participants from TAFE colleges reported on pressures experienced in TAFE settings in making the Certificate fit in with the complexities of enrolment and accreditation in a TAFE setting (I.4., R.8.). These issues need to be addressed at the level of the colleges themselves.

4.9.7 Impact of National Framework

A major concern is lack of knowledge of the National Framework and the uncertainty about whether and to what extent the National Framework will supersede the CGEA or change it. In fact, the National Framework is not a curriculum document but a framework to guide the writing of curriculum documents. However, the prevailing uncertainty may undermine commitment to the CGEA. A number of people have asked whether "all this will be for nothing". It is important that the experience of this first year of implementation be fed into the processes of developing the National Framework and National Reporting System and that the relationship between the two be clarified.[7]

4.9.8 Professional development workshops appreciated

There was positive feedback about the professional development workshops that

have been successfully run as part of the implementation projects. Some commented that more were needed, especially in the reading and writing streams. A few participants commented upon workshop leaders giving differing versions of the implementation guidelines.

5. DISCUSSION: EXPLORING ALTERNATIVE MODES OF COMPETENCY-BASED ASSESSMENT

This evaluation report confirms that the field is committed to continuing to implement and to develop an accredited certificate in ALBE and that the implementation of the CGEA has been an important step towards this aim.

The single biggest difficulty that has been encountered in all streams and in the Certificate overall is the performative, criterion-referenced assessment which is seen as over-prescriptive and educationally inappropriate.

Teachers are confronting the conflict between their pedagogical practices and commitments and the requirements of competency-based assessment which are constructed within a very different set of discourses than those which have constructed their pedagogical understandings and practices in the past (Lee and Wickert, 1994). In this final section of the report I offer a brief discussion of the issue of competency-based assessment in ALBE, based on the reflective reports, the interviews, a reading of the current literature, the debates surrounding competency-based training and my own understanding of 'where the field is at'.

Clearly policy-making bodies at the State and national level are committed to a competency-based approach. Now that we have had a year to become familiar with what this means in practice, we have the opportunity to further analyse the 'competency movement' in the context of ALBE. Any modifications of the CGEA must incorporate notions of competency which are more in keeping with our (evolving) notions of 'good practice'.

In the introduction to *A collection of readings in relation to competency-based training* Brown (1994) states that (the VEETAC) industry-based definition of CBT[8] (on which the CGEA is based) is regarded as authoritative, but that there are a number of other ways 'competency' can be defined in relation to training and education. In fact, there is no single definition of CBT. There are degrees of 'competencyness', and different versions of it. He goes on to suggest that teachers can "do their job the best way they know how, exploring the boundaries and making creative interpretations of what constitutes competency-based training" (p.14).

There is a well-documented critique of narrow 'behavioural' competency-based approaches which focus on the display of performance. For example, the work of Michael Collins (Collins, 1994), Nancy Jackson (Jackson, 1994a), Barbara Preston and Jim Walker (Preston, 1993) Victor Soucek (Soucek, 1994) and Simon Marginson (Marginson, 1994).

The adult basic education profession and competence: promoting best practice report (Scheeres, 1993) exemplifies a more holistic understanding of 'competency'. The elements and performance criteria are described by means of descriptive benchmarks of complex practice; they are a guide to professional development or the development of career paths and are not intended to be used (nor could they be used) as a framework for the performative assessment of teachers.

The draft National Framework of Adult English Language, Literacy and Numeracy Competence (ACTRAC, 1993) also moves away from the behavioural version of CBT taken up by VEETAC and defines 'competence' more broadly and holistically. Competency is described as "relationship between knowing and doing". "Competence requires a connection of performance and knowledge and skills, co-ordinated in such a way as to achieve social goals in particular contexts" (p.5). The competence descriptors within the National Framework defy division into separate performance criteria, range and conditions because of the complexity built into the statements of competence themselves.

In a paper entitled, *Competency-based Standards in the professions and higher education* (Preston and Walker, 1993) the authors discuss the characteristics of the behavioural approach to competencies which they say calls for activities which are discrete and observable; in which there is no room for the element of judgement; and where no account is taken of the impact of group processes or of surrounding culture. The 'holistic' or 'integrated' approach to competencies, on the other hand, "recognises the complexity and contextual variety of competent performance, the role of judgement, and the importance of self-evaluation and improvement".

The existence of these alternative understandings of 'competence' and 'competency' problematises the definition of competence that has been used as the basis of the VAELLNAF. What alternative ways could be found for describing and assessing levels of competence in ALBE? Are there interpretations that would be less restrictive than the one utilised in the VAELLNAF and more compatible with our understandings of pedagogical best practice? As one project participant stated:

> *A question that needs to be asked is to what extent the notion of competence in an occupational or vocational training context, can be applied to 'competence' as constructed in relation to notional levels and stages in processes of learning and developing literacy in a wide range of contexts and environments. 'Competence' in education is not really about the competent performance of tasks but is constructed abstractly to describe (notional) stages in complex processes of learning (I.7.).*

This participant put forward a powerful critique of criterion-referenced assessment (the form of competency-based training currently informing the framework) on the following basis:

> *All the evidence about practical knowledge points to the fact that people don't use abstract criteria, they use cases, prototypes. So it would be much more important [in making a judgement] if somebody would say, "here is the sort of thing we are talking about, here's one, here's another, etc". So the assumption that people use necessary and sufficient conditions in deciding whether or not something is a case of something or not, is completely out of kilter with cognitive psychology which says that people use prototypes. I certainly don't use an explicit set of criteria for making judgements.*
>
> *Highly skilled practitioners are using a whole range of knowledge to make their judgements. For example, you and I may agree in our judgments even though we are using completely different theoretical frameworks. The problem only arises*

when somebody insists that we have to justify our judgements by reference to detailed explicit criteria. Do we use your categories, or mine? So we select one, but then whoever it is who is excluded is screwed. Does this mean you have to abandon your way of knowing whether this counts as, say, a two or a three? So, CBT is actually based on a completely false theory of what knowledge is and what competence is. This is a terrible thing.

Even the theories of how this is an example of that and how to read something, compete with one another. We should produce lots of different theorisations about making those judgements. The things I might focus on may be quite different from the things you focus on. Theory of both pedagogy and language is contested. There is no way that is the right way and always will be right way. Discussion and negotiation is part of the educational culture (I.7.).

In the *DEET Assessment Practical Guide* David Rumsey talks about flexibility as a principle of competency-based training as follows:

"Within a competency-based system, a number of different types of assessment can be used. These can be grouped under various headings:

- *holistic assessment.*
- *summative assessment*
- *formative assessment*
- *diagnostic assessment*
- *RPL and/or experience "*

"Assessment is said to be holistic when it covers, in an integrated way, multiple elements and/or units from relevant competency standards. The integrated approach seeks to combine knowledge, understanding, problem-solving, technical skills, attitudes and ethics into assessment tasks" (Rumsey 1994, p.12).

In the *DEET Assessment Technical Manual*, Hagar, Athanasou and Gonczi argue that in assessing complex performances, there is a need for judgement and a need to find ways of aggregating the evidence on the various assessment events. "Complex performances do not lend themselves to a detailed check list or rating scale..." (Hagar 1994, p.69). Hagar et al quote Wolf (1993): "People operate within complex, tacit models of performance in which they compensate and weigh evidence by comparing the individual performance to their tacit model. The consistency of their judgement can be aided by clear verbal criteria, but even more important is the identification, from actual examples, of what the typical performances look like. In other words, the articulation of tacit models is actually like the process of developing criteria for different levels of performance in a short-hand and context-specific way" (p.92).

Criteria for higher level performances could be developed as 'guides for assessors' rather than as additional performance criteria. This is in line with the 'judgemental' model. This entails a need for groups of assessors to come together to discuss their exemplars "in order to bring to the surface their tacit performance criteria and create greater reliability" (p.92).

It seems that the model of CBT that the ALBE sector has acquired through VEETAC could be reconstructed in order to better suit the unique conditions and needs of assessment in our educational sector, taking into account the recent theoretical work that has been done on integrated and holistic models of competency-based learning discussed in the 1994 *DEET Assessment Manuals* and elsewhere. As an educational sector, we have an opportunity, based on our initial years of experience with the existing model to feed into and enrich the competency-based approach itself and to develop a more flexible model of competency-based assessment. Such a model would acknowledge the complexity and high level of discrimination required in judgements about levels of competency in developing language, literacy, communication, numeracy and group process skills.

An appropriate model of assessment of competency in ALBE would turn upon the professional judgement of the assessor and the weighing of evidence, rather than the application of criteria, range and conditions. Whereas the performance criteria with their range and conditions imply the necessity of criterion-referenced assessment, the broad competency statements in the VAELLNAF (one for each level for each of the four streams) in fact imply the need for more holistic and multi-dimensional professional judgements to be made. For example, the competency level 4 for Reading and Writing is "read and write at a level that displays more detailed, sophisticated technical knowledge and vocabulary and sophisticated language use, includes more objective and analytic processes and is precisely structured and sustained in length". Such an abstract statement of competency, defined in purely relative terms, could surely only be assessed in a holistic, rather than a reductionist way, involving the weighing of evidence and making of a professional judgement in the light of a model of competency which is clearly described and about which there is a degree of shared understanding with other practitioners.

So, in what way can flexibility and the element of professional judgement be reintroduced in the next version of the Certificate framework?

One suggestion is that we retain the competency statements at each level of each stream, and expand the description of the elements so that the performance criteria, instead of being separated out as unitary 'tests' of performance which must each be seen to be fulfilled in every case, are written into an expanded and complex description of the element itself. As Hagar, Athanasou and Gonczi suggest, they should be 'guides to assessment,' rather than criteria of performance. These then become *indications* of complex performance, rather than *necessary conditions* of it, in a manner similar to that of the original ABEAF framework. The judgement that is made about the competence of the person becomes a question of professional judgement which weighs a range of evidence, taking into account the suggested indications of competence and including the teachers' knowledge of the performance of the person throughout the course, within an agreed descriptive framework of levels of competence.

The emphasis then would be shifted from legalistic scrutiny of particular assessment tasks, and ticking off criteria, to a gathering and assessment of a range of evidence which is assessed as a whole; a judgement that integrates experience with evidence and takes into account a range of criteria (or indicators) of competency

and how these might be reflected in different contexts.

The adult basic education profession and competence: promoting best practice (Scheeres, et al, 1993) is clearly not an assessment document, but it is a good example of an approach to competency which responds to the complexity of educational contexts. It may therefore be relevant to those of us who are struggling to develop a competency-based model appropriate to the ABE classroom itself. The authors state that,

> *The approach to competency descriptions here, as outlined earlier in this report, is based on the belief that stated competencies are not necessarily observable in themselves (and certainly not observable in discrete tasks), but rather they are able to be inferred from performance. The cues are not to be seized upon as mandatory criteria, but are examples of guides to the sorts of evidence relevant to performance criteria (p.9).*

A common understanding of what constitutes competent performance would be aided, as Hagar suggests, by developing a bank of exemplars which are shared across the State. Validity and reliability would be supported through the processes of moderation that has already been developed. (Hagar talks about "assessors coming together to discuss their exemplars".) Teachers would be accountable to each other in terms of the evidence that they have gathered that the element has been achieved - with room for leeway in special circumstances. For the CGEA, this could be done by a portfolio of work of each student which may include, for example, one piece of work that is completely independent and a written report by the teacher as to why a student has or has not reached a certain level of competency. Moderation would consist of practitioners sharing their judgements about student competence, but with a different emphasis.

The assessment of competence by stream and by level could be done at a global level, rather than at the reductionist level of criteria which together are said to constitute the elements, which in turn are said to constitute the general statements of competence . For example, competency level 2: "Read and write at a level not entirely concrete nor only related to personal experience but starting to show some diversity in organisation and style". The description of each element would be expanded so that the performance criteria become descriptors (and there might be more or different ones). The assessment would be based on a folio of a minimum number of pieces of work which taken together should cover each of the four elements or domains. However, it would not be expected that each piece of work reflects exactly all aspects of the description of each element, but that overall, the elements were covered. Such a procedure would be validated and supported by local and regional moderation processes.

These and other models or possibilities of 'exploring the boundaries' of the discourse of competency-based training and constructing more flexible and holistic competency-based assessment procedures need to be explored in preparing for the next version of the CGEA.

6. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

6.1 Achievements

The introduction of the CGEA has contributed positively to the development of adult literacy and basic education in Victoria notwithstanding a number of difficulties experienced by participants in this project. In documenting the diverse outcomes, I have attempted to be even-handed in enabling the range of voices and opinions to be heard. At the same time, my own positioning as a teacher of the Certificate and my own critique has no doubt helped to shape the selection of issues, the analysis of outcomes and the formulation of recommendations.

In summarising the findings in this section, I have attempted to strike a balance and to articulate the tensions and uncertainties which co-exist with the perceived achievements. Given the complex and contradictory environment in which the CGEA came into being, it is impossible to make any singular or totalising statements about the overall success of the CGEA. There is no 'objective' viewpoint outside the interaction of particular discourses which we are all part of. The discourses with which the majority of project participants (including myself) identify and which are reflected most strongly in this report are those of pedagogical good practice, learner-centredness and student needs. However, there is a recognition of the underlying issues and the discourses informing the National Training Reform Agenda. Teachers are engaging with these discourses as they seek to reconcile them with older discourses of pedagogical good practice where possible. There are many uncertainties and unknowns about the opportunities for and limits to this project.

Evaluation of the CGEA needs to be located in this context of ambivalence and uncertainty:

- The CGEA has "brought ALBE in from the margins". It has raised its profile by giving it a coherent framework and a greater role in public educational policy.. This involves an increase in accountability to government funding authorities but a corresponding decrease in accountability to the communities and students who are served by it.

- The advent of accreditation and the challenges of implementing the Certificate in its first year have lead to increased professional awareness and self-confidence in some teachers; and to feelings of frustration and disaffection in others.

- Students now have access to a recognised credential which aims to stream-line their pathways through the wider educational system and affirm their progress as they achieve milestones in the development of their skills. The extent to which this will be achieved, however, is not yet known.

- The Certificate framework has introduced greater rigour into curriculum planning and a heightened awareness of domains and genres of literacy and the differing pedagogies that relate to each of these. As it stands, however, the framework is seen by many as being too rigid and constrains of good practice.

• Moderation processes have been very successful in providing an opportunity to moderate student assessments and to develop a common language of description of student progress. The opportunities for discussion of issues and networking have also been appreciated by many participants. The confusions and frustrations that have been reported in relation to moderation probably relate to problems of implementation and to short-comings in the framework itself.

• In taking up the challenge of the CGEA, many teachers have been through a phase of intensive reflection on their practice; in adapting their pedagogies to the requirements, they have found opportunities for creativity, developing new pedagogical insights and techniques. On the other hand, more professional development is required to build on this phase of reflection and to ensure that sessional and part-time contract teachers are included and supported.

6.2 Issues for Future Research and Analysis

In this section, issues that are referred to in the findings (section 4 of this report) and which call for further research, analysis or policy development are summarised. Many of these issues relate to the struggle to maintain and develop quality of provision in the policy context which is now characterised by both marketisation and greater managerial accountability. The issues listed in sections 6.2.1 to 6.2.5 include issues of significance in terms of national policy directions and broader educational questions that have been raised in the course of this evaluation. Sections 6.2.6 to 6.2.12 summarise issues to be considered and further researched locally in preparation for redeveloping and revising the CGEA.

6.2.1 The CGEA in the context of tendering and marketisation

- What will be the long-term impact on the quality of provision of the CGEA of the practice of tendering and the increasing trend towards marketization?

- How can traditions of collaboration between providers (for example, in moderation, professional development and sharing of curriculum resources) be maintained alongside the competitive tendering for programs?

- How are sessionally-paid teachers on short-term contracts coping with the increased demands of teaching to the CGEA? Are there any differences between permanent or long-term contract staff and sessional staff in their approaches to working with the CGEA?

- Given that DEET are requiring that SIP-funded courses be accredited, and that renewal of funding for individual providers requires evidence of job- or training-related outcomes, how will the pressure to achieve such quantifiable outcomes impact on student selection and on classroom pedagogy?

6.2.2 The impact on funding

- What will be the impact of accreditation on the provision of funding for ALBE programs in the future? What funding will be available for ALBE programs that are outside the CGEA framework and which cater for students for whom it is not appropriate?

- How does the offering of the CGEA impact on small, community-based providers? How can small rural providers be supported to meet the additional costs of moderation and professional development that the CGEA entails?

6.2.3 Issues of pedagogy and assessment

- To what extent do the values of 'learner-centredness' and social and individual development (which are central to traditional notions of adult literacy pedagogy) risk being compromised by the competency-based approach as it currently stands (or to what extent can the two be made compatible)?

- What are the pedagogical and methodological issues that arise in relation to the tension between maintaining the 'integrity' of curriculum and implementing the prescribed structure of streams, levels and domains, elements and performance criteria?

- What creative solutions are teachers finding to this tension?

- If competency-based assessment is not appropriate in the context of adult literacy and basic education, what other forms of assessment would be appropriate and acceptable to the field and to policy-making bodies? In particular, what alternative forms of assessment could be developed which are reliable, valid and fair, but which utilise professional judgement and the weighing of evidence, rather than the application of prescribed criteria?

- If at this stage a competency-based approach is inevitable, could a simpler and less restrictive form of competency-based assessment (one which is compatible with notions of a holistic and eclectic pedagogy) be developed? What would be the processes for doing this?

6.2.4 Impact on students

- What are the students' perceptions of their learning experiences in CGEA courses?

- What is the attitude of students to the CGEA and to the awarding of a statewide credential?

- What are the subsequent learning pathways of students who are awarded statements of attainment or who complete the CGEA at either level 4 or at foundation level?

- Has accreditation improved access to provision of training and further education for students in the mainstream?

6.2.5 The impact of the CGEA on teachers

- How significant is the increased work load associated with the CGEA? Does this remain constant or does it decrease as teachers become more confident and experienced with the requirements?
- How are sessionally-paid teaching staff managing the increased work load associated with the CGEA?
- How do teachers understand the processes of change that they are experiencing, in coping with the stresses of teaching with the CGEA ?
- To what extent are teachers acceding to the new requirements, and to what extent are they resisting and attempting to change aspects which they find unacceptable?
- In what ways has the introduction of the CGEA facilitated the development of 'good practice'?
- How do teachers describe 'good practice' in the light of the CGEA framework with its domains, levels and competencies?
- What professional development is needed to support teachers in developing competency-based curricula and teaching in a competency-based framework?
- What is the effect of higher levels of accountability on the professional standing of teachers of ALBE?

6.2.6 Impact on course planning

- How well is the nominal 80 hours per stream per level fitting in with the curriculum and assessment requirements, in the experience of teachers teaching the Certificate?
- How compatible is the CGEA with the 20 weeks of a normal DEET-funded course in terms of the time required for students to reach appropriate levels of competency for either the foundation or the full certificate ?
- For students who are unable to gain a certificate in one 20 week course, is the awarding of statements of attainment, a credible and valued alternative?
- To what extent have 'statements of attainment' been successful in terms of their portability and as building blocks in subsequent courses?
- What are the costs and benefits of using the CGEA in part-time (4 hours or less)

or evening courses?

- What are the issues in using the CGEA framework for pre-level 1 students?
- What are the issues in using the CGEA in providing for mildly intellectually handicapped students?

6.2.7 Reading and Writing Streams

- Is competency-based training an appropriate system to support the development of complex language and writing skills?
- What is the impact of the competency-based framework on pedagogy at the very early levels of gaining literacy?
- To what extent is the framework of the four domains appropriate in meeting the diverse needs of literacy students?

6.2.8 Oral Communication Stream

- How are we to understand the development of oral communication skills in relation to the different processes of acquiring literacy, numeracy and conceptual skills? Which theoretical frameworks are useful in understanding this process?
- What are the educational reasons for either retaining a separate oral communication stream or recombining it with reading and writing?
- How can oral communication be assessed without artificiality or the risk of cultural imposition or discrimination?
- What are the issues of power and cultural dominance that teachers need to be aware of in assessing oral communication skills?
- Is the CGEA an appropriate framework and certificate for the teaching of ESL or ESL literacy to NESB students? Could it be made more appropriate?

6.2.9 Numeracy Stream

- What is the impact of competency-based assessment on teaching and learning in numeracy?
- Can the numeracy stream be developed to meet vocational as well as further education goals in numeracy?

6.2.10 General Curriculum Option

- What are the issues in combining in the one credential the Mayer (key) competencies of the General Curriculum Option with the skill-specific competencies (the elements) in the other three streams of the Certificate?

- How useful has the CGO been in accrediting locally-determined subjects? What kinds of subjects have been offered as General Curriculum Options?

- What are the issues in the application of the GCO to industrial and vocational training and/or as a means of gaining skills relevant to the VCE or tertiary education?

- How are the principles of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) to be applied in the delivery of the GCO?

6.2.11 Issues of articulation

- How well does the CGEA articulate into either vocational training or the VCE? Where have students who obtained Certificates in 1993, 94 and 95 gone on to?

- How do the assessment levels of the CGEA compare with those of their school equivalents (Year 10, VCE Years 11 and 12)?

- How successful is the CGEA as a framework for industrial or workplace training or used in conjunction with industry based courses?

6.2.12 Moderation and Implementation

- Can moderation be extended to become a regular forum for networking and professional development within regions and Statewide?

- How can it be adequately funded?

- How can moderation be further developed to address the issues that have been raised in this report and to clarify the areas of continuing confusion?

- What is the process for the development of RPL guidelines in relation to the CGEA ?

- What professional development will be offered to support practitioners in relating the CGEA to the National Framework and National Reporting System?

- How successful has the provision of the CGEA in other States been? What feedback is available?

- What can be learned by comparing the implementation of the CGEA with that of its equivalents in other States (and in the UK)?

6.3 Recommendations

Following are the major recommendations that have arisen from the findings of this evaluation project:

1. A review and revision of the VAELLNAF and the CGEA, taking into account the findings of this evaluation and a number of other CGEA project reports, is necessary. This work should commence as soon as possible.

2. The revision must be properly resourced and undertaken by practitioners who participated in the implemention of the Certificate in 1994. It should take into account the experience of teachers throughout the initial period of implementation of the CGEA, and the issues that are detailed in sections 4 and 5 of this report. It should include a review of the latest literature on assessment and competency-based approaches with a view to developing a form of assessment which is more appropriate to the current understandings of pedagogical 'good practice' in ALBE.

3. A central unit should be established to oversee and co-ordinate the processes of implementation, moderation and revision of the document and the co-ordination of support projects. In particular it would be responsible for the provision of relevant professional development.

4. The ALRNN should co-ordinate with ACFEB to seek funding to support a range of further research projects suggested by the findings in this report. In particular, competency-based assessment, the articulation of the CGEA into mainstream training and education, its role in workplace basic education, its impact on students and issues of classroom pedagogy need to be researched in ways which bring theory and practice together and contribute to the development of better practice in ALBE.

ENDNOTES

[1] Following the custom in the field the acronym 'CGEA' has been used, rather than the 'CsGEA' or the commonly used term, 'the Certificate'. This may also be taken to mean the Victorian Adult English Language , Literacy and Numeracy Accreditation Framework (the VAELLNAF) as all these terms are often used interchangeably.

[2] Quotations used throughout the report are referenced as follows: Journal Reports 1-11 (R.1., R.2., etc), Interviews 1-13 (I.1., etc)

[3] The elements are broad statements of competency that relate to each stream within each module. For example, "Reading and Writing Module 1, *Element 1.2: Writing for Practical Purposes:* Write a simple practical text of 1 - 2 sentences".

[4] The 'intelligibility criterion' runs throughout all the domains and levels of the Oral Communication stream: level 1, "intelligibility (grammar and pronunciation) may make demands on other participants"; level 2, "intelligibility makes occasional demands on listeners"; level 3, intelligibility rarely makes demands on listeners"; and level 4, "intelligibility makes no demands on listeners".

[5] General Curriculum Option Element 2.6: Can solve problems

1. Clarify desired outcomes and processes
2. Maintain focus through to an appropriate completion
3. Respond to faults and difficulties as they arise
4. Check the accuracy of the outcomes and the utility of the process

[6] Pre-printed certificates have since been produced by ARIS on behalf of ACFE and distributed through the regional offices.

[7] A framework for translating CGEA levels of competency onto the The National Reporting System has since been developed.

[8] The VEETAC definition is as follows: "Competency-based training is concerned with the attainment and demonstration of specified skills and knowledge and their application to minimum industry specified standards as endorsed by the National Training Board (NTB). (VEETAC Working Party on the Implementation of Competency Based Training, 1992).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

ACFEB 1994a, *Agreed Annotated Variations* , Adult, Community and Further Education Board.

ACFEB 1994b, *Moderation in the CsGEA* , Adult, Community and Further Education Board.

ACFEB and STB 1993, *Certificates of General Education for Adults within the Victorian Adult,English Language, Literacy and Numeracy Framework (VAELNAF).* Adult, Community and Further Education Board and the State Training Board, Victoria.

ACTRAC 1993, *The National Framework of Adult English Language, Literacy and Numeracy Competence (Draft)* Australian Committee for Training Curriculum.

ALRNN ,1994a, *Report of Numeracy Workshop, Evaluation as Research Seminar* , ALRNN.

ALRNN 1994b, *Report of Oral Communication Workshop, Evaluation as Research Workshop.*

ALRNN 1994c, *Report of Reading and Writing Workshop, Evaluation as Research Seminar* .

ARIS 1994 - 95, CsGEA Information Sheets. Adult Basic Education Resource and Information Service (Melbourne).

Bottomly, Y., Dalton, J. & Corbel, C. 1994, *From Proficiency to Competencies - a collaborative approach to curriculum innovation* , Adult Migrant Education Service, funded by the D.I.E.A. through the NCELTR.

Brearley, L. 1994a, Bringing the General Curriculum Options to Life. *Fine Print,* 16 (1), 1-19.

Brearley, L. & Starbuck, D 1994b, *Keeping It Together: professional development for the VAELLNAF and CGE(A), reading and writing streams integrated with the oral communication stream* , Barton College of TAFE.

Brown, L. 1990, Self Evaluation for System Improvement. In P. Group (Ed.), *Group Self Evaluation: a collection of readings* , Melbourne: Office of Schools Administration, Ministry of Education.

Brown, M. 1994a Competency-based training: skill formation for the workplace or classroom Taylorism? in J. Kenway (ed.), *Economising Education: the post-Fordist directions* , Geelong: Deakin University.

Brown, M. 1994b, An introduction to the discourse on competency-based training (CBT). In D. U. C. D. Centre (ed.), *A Collection of Readings Related to Competency-*

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Based Training , (pp. 1 - 13). Geelong: Deakin University.

Carr, W. &. Kemmis, S. 1986, *Becoming Critical: Knowing Through Action Research.*, Deakin University, Geelong.

Coates, S. 1994, The CGEA and national frameworks - a genealogy. *Fine Print*, 16(1), 7-9.

Collins, M. 1994, A Critical Analysis of Competency-Based Systems in Adult Education. In D. U. C. D. team (Ed.), *A Collection of Readings Related to Competency-basedTraining* , (pp. 215 - 224). Geelong: Deakin University.

Gilding, N. 1994, The struggle for critical literacy and feminist reform: some axioms and observations, *Open Letter*, 4(2), 3-11.

Goulburn, B. and Manton, S. 1994, *Talking Curriculum: a practitioner's guide to the Certificate of General Education for Adults Oral Communication Stream* , ACFEB.

Hagar, P., Athanasou, J. and Gonczi, A. *Assessment Technical Manual,* Department of Employment, Education and Training, A.G.P.S.

Hammond, J., Wickert, R., Burns, A., Joyce, H., & Miller, A. 1992, The pedagogical relations between adult ESL and adult literacy - some directions for research, *Open Letter*, 3(2), 16-31.

Henry, C. and Kemmis, S. 1985, A Point-by-Point Guide to Action Research for Teachers. *The Australian Administrator*, Vol.6,(No.4), 1 - 4.

Holly, M. L. 1987, *Keeping a Personal Professional Journal,* Geelong: Deakin University.

Jackson, N. 1994a, The Case Against 'Competence': the impoverishment of working knowledge. In D. U. C. Team (Ed.), *A Collection of Readings Related to Competency-Based Training* , Deakin University, Geelong.

Jackson, N. 1994b, If Competence is the Answer, What is the Question? In D.U.C. Team (Ed.), *A Collection of Original Essays on Curriculum for the Workplace* , Geelong: Deakin University.

Kalantzis, M. 1993, The State of Pedagogy in *Fine Printt*, Spring, 1993, 4 - 8.

Kemmis, S. & McTaggart, R. 1988 *The Action Research Planner*, Geelong: Deakin University.

Kemmis, Stephen and Stake, Robert, 1988, *Evaluating Curriculum*, Course Team, Deakin University.

Kemmis, Stephen, (unpublished paper)*Action Research and Communicative Action*, address to a meeting of the "Innovative Links Project", Melbourne, May 26, 1995.

Lambert, F., and Owen, John in conjunction with Coates, Sharon and McQueen, Julie 1993, *Adult Literacy and Basic Education: A Guide to Program Evaluation*, DEET, Commonwealth of Australia (in press).

Lee, A. and Wickert, R. 1994, Deconstructing Adult Literacy Teaching. *Open Letter*, 5 (1), 55 - 68.

Luke, A. 1992, Literacy and work in 'New Times', *Open Letter*, 3(1), 3.

Luke, A. 1994, Getting our hands dirty: provisional politics in postmodern conditions, Chapter for Philip Wexler and Richard Smith, Eds, *After Postmodernism: Education, Politics and Identity*, London: Falmer Press (in press).

Lyons, Sara, 1994, *An Assessment Guide for ABE Programs in Victoria*, ACFEB.

Lyons, Sara & Dixon, Carol, (in press, due 1995)*A Teachers' Guide to Enhancing Literacy for Learners from Diverse Language and Cultural Backgrounds* , ACFEB.

McTaggart, Robin 1991,*Action Research A Short Modern History*, Geelong: Deakin University.

McTaggart, Robin 1994, *Participatory Action Research: issues in theory and practice*, in Educational Action Research, Vol. 2, No. 3.

Marginson, S. 1993, *Education and Public Policy in Australia.*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne.

Marginson, S. 1995, Is Competency Based Learning a Good Enough Framework for Learning? *Critical Forum*, Vol.3, Nos 2&3, April.

McCormack, R. 1994, Talking Turkey or Sitting Ducks: a history of the CGEA. *Fine Print*, Autumn, 1994.

McKenna, R. 1994, Adult Literacy and Basic Education: the bigger picture. *Fine Print*, Autumn, 1994.

National Centre for English Language Training and Research, 1995, *Prospect*, Vol.9, No.2, September. (The whole issue is devoted to the debate around competency based training and ESL.)

Nunan, D. 1993, What's the Use of Research? *TESOL in Context*, Vol.3, No.2.

O'Neill, F. 1994, Teaching health through the four domains, *Fine Print*, 16(1), 25-26.

Pegler, F. 1994, Moderation in Mildura. *Fine Print*, 16(1), 23`24.

Pobega, D. 1994a, Compromised Positions. *Fine Print*, Winter, 1994.

Pobega, D. 1994b, Editorial - Finding the bouncing acronym, *Fine Print*, 16(1), 3.

Preston, B. and Walker, J. 1993, Competency-based Standards in the Professions and Higher Education. In C. Collins (Ed.), *Competencies: the Competency Debate in Australian Education and Training* , (reprinted in NOW in FE Newsletter, Melbourne, Issue 1, 1994, p.14).

Purdey, M. 1994, In All Things Moderation, *Fine Print*, 16(1), 21-23.

Rumsey, D. 1994, *Assessment Practical Guide*, Department of Employment, Education and Training, A.G.P.S.

Sanguinetti, J. 1994a, Exploring the Discourses of our own Practice, *Open Letter*, 5(1), pp. 31 -44.

Sanguinetti, J. 1994b, Practitioner Power Through Participatory Action Research, *Fine Print*, Spring, 1994.

Scheeres, H. 1994, The ABE Profession and Competence: promoting best practice, *Fine Print*, Summer, 1994.

Scheeres, H. G., Gonczi, A., Hager, p. & Morley-Warner,T., 1993,*The Adult Basic Education Profession and Competence: Promoting Best Practice* , University of Technology, Sydney.

Seddon, T. 1994, Changing Contexts - New Debates: ALBE in the 1990s, *Open Letter*, Vol.5, No.1, pp. 3 - 16.

Soucek , 1994. Flexible education and New Standards of Communicative Competence in J. Kenway (ed.), *Economising Education: The Post-Fordist Directions* , (pp. 43 - 104). Geelong: Deakin University.

State Training Board and Department of Further Education, 1992, *Adult Basic Education Accreditation Framework Project: Draft Competence Statements for Reading and Writing, Vols 1 and 2.*, DFE snd STB.

Suda, L. 1994, Framed, Accredited, Certified, *Fine Print*, Autumn, 1994.

Threadgold, T. 1994, Linguistic Utopias and Political Ventriloquism, *Fine Print*, Summer, 1994.

VALBEC, October, 1994, Rural Perceptions. *Broadsheet*, October, 1994.

Wadsworth, Y. 1991, *Everyday Evaluation on the Run.*, Melbourne: Action Research Issues Association (Incorporated).

Weedon, 1987 *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory*, Oxford, UK, Cambridge, Mass.: Basil Blackwell.

Wolfe, P. 1994, Teaching the CsGEA in the Country, *Fine Print*, Summer, 1994.

Yeatman, A. 1990, *Bureaucrats, Technocrats, Femocrats.*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney.

ELEVEN TEACHERS REFLECT ON THE IMPACT OF THE CGEA ON THEIR PRACTICE

Eleven reflective reports written by the teachers who constituted the evaluation working group follow. Each of the teachers kept a personal/professional diary between August and November, 1994, documenting their thoughts and experiences in relation to the impact of the CGEA on their classroom and professional practice. The teachers then submitted reports, relating critical incidents and summarising the key issues. The reports have been slightly edited for length and style. The reports are anonymous; the names of the authors are grouped with the names of other project participants in the acknowledgements.

1. REAL LIFE TEXTS CANNOT BE NEATLY BOXED

My response to the CGEA sounds like an ABE student's review of a film he saw: "It is good in parts". Having worked with the document for over a year, the warts have become evident. While the original Frameworks (the 'Background Works') enlightened my practice and informed my planning, the accredited certificate which followed it has sometimes had the opposite effect. A year later, I am still not convinced that CBT and language and literacy sit comfortably together.

At the end of last year I was forced to re-examine my practice and planning. Preparing documentation, assisting tutors and rewriting obsolete curriculum documents to make way for the Certificate, I had to make explicit the theory that underpinned my teaching. Before I could deliver the CGEA I had to prioritise the elements of past programs which could not be compromised. While I recognised CBT would mean a change in my assessment processes, I did not think it should entail giving up aspects of programs that I knew worked, or giving up on students' needs. The transfer to the CGEA has set me on a course of reassessing the assumptions which I took into the classroom.

Having taught ABE for some years now, I must admit to my stockpile of "things that work" and "this is how I always teach..." approaches. The CGEA has helped clear away some of these cobwebs of habit. The demands of assessing 12 elements in 'Reading', 'Writing' and 'Oracy' at particular levels forced me to reorganise some of my planning and try to better integrate my classroom activities. An example best illustrates this. Usually I start programs with what is now known as the 'self expression' domain. Always students had personal experiences they could write about and I had a collection of accessible, high interest texts that struck a chord. However in a new class, I did not expect students to contribute personal experiences amongst strangers and so 'Oracy for Self Expression' always came later. Yet this semester, more conscious of integrating activities, I changed my usual tack. I introduced 'public debate' in the second class and it worked. The issue was straight forward enough for students to take up and all were willing and eager to contribute to discussing a fairly safe subject without feeling threatened or exposed. This change in old habits really has resulted from the CGEA which focused me more rigorously on oracy practice and assessment. Being a communications skills teacher I had always thought I included a great many opportunities for oral episodes, yet the CGEA has made explicit the standards that I should be aiming for in assessment of oracy.

To a lesser extent this is true of the whole document; it does provide me with a ready made checklist of stringent performance criteria to assess student work, but I am sure this is what assessment is all about. I am still not prepared to swallow the whole performance criteria approach hook, line and sinker. There are monumental achievements of many ABE students which I cannot assess with the CGEA document. Increased confidence and self-esteem, a first contribution to a discussion, completing a piece of writing, perceiving the self as learner and gaining pleasure from a text for the first time are just as important outcomes to me as "using and, but and so" or "ordering information by the cause and effect or by classification connections".

Last semester I gave the CGEA a go, but my classes were far too 'assessment task' driven. Counting off the 12 elements, setting numerous assessment tasks and seeing if students had achieved all the performance criteria were far too much my focus. Now down the track somewhat and more familiar with the shortfalls in the certificate document, I am more circumspect. I look to the earlier ABEAF frameworks document more to inform my practice. The later accreditation document is mainly something I consult when designing assessment tasks and moderating. To design a syllabus, I focus on my students' current skills and future goals and my understanding of what works in the classroom.

With my current group I am not willing to let assessment intrude and take time from other classroom activities. I am integrating assessment tasks where possible. I am attempting to assess reading not only through written question/answer type approach, but through group discussion, role plays, students posing questions, students compiling surveys etc. The small size of the group allows me to assess many of the oracy elements through observing classroom interaction, rather than setting artificial teacher driven tasks. Unobtrusively, I can assess participation minus the unwieldy checklist ready to tick off all the students against the many performance criteria. In a numeracy class where we are integrating literacy, the possibilities of integrating and lessening the number of assessment tasks across the streams are becoming obvious. The challenge here is to develop uncomplicated record keeping procedures, inform students of our intentions to include assessment from their other subjects and correlate all the material with other teachers.

Yet even when using the Certificate for assessment purposes, I am finding there are difficulties. The complexities of the writing process are not always adequately recognized in a minimalist checklist of performance criteria. The performance criteria on their own cannot measure other important qualities of written texts such as the complex pre-writing decisions, subtle variations in tone, use of language and analogy and creation of mood, the often multiple purposes of a text. There are problems associated with text based criteria that are becoming more and more apparent.

Last month a student completed a 'practical purposes' text that met all the performance criteria of level 3. The student had designed a poster explaining new government regulations. It contained 'detailed factual information', 'technical knowledge' etc, yet it did not achieve its purpose which was to inform clearly to the student population the changes that would affect them. As a text it was not effective, yet it met all the performance criteria!

It seems to me there are more complex interrelationships between language and audience and text that result in an effective document than the performance criteria acknowledge.

Moreover real life texts cannot be neatly boxed into the range and conditions either. I have found so many texts that fit all my criteria (i.e. high interest, appropriate level, relevant, well written) only to find they do not match the specified range and conditions. Texts vary so much and so often contain features of multiple domains. The 'knowledge' domain usually contains features of 'public debate' and vice versa. Is a film review 'self expression', 'public debate' or 'practical purposes'?

The 'practical purposes' domain seems particularly problematic. (At moderation sessions we refer to it as "writing for recipes"!) Whoever heard of business letters or job descriptions with diagrams (as prescribed in Element 4.2., *Writing for Practical Purposes?* Why should students battle to understand texts with "ill-placed and/or highly complex diagrams" (as described in the range and conditions of Element 4.6, *Reading for Practical Purposes*? Surely the whole purpose of this domain is to to learn to convey information and instructions in clear, non-technical, English.

To avoid narrowing my focus, I use texts, even in assessment tasks, which do not fit all the range and conditions. More and more the challenge becomes a case of designing assessment tasks and selecting materials that allow students to develop the skills to demonstrate the performance criteria, *and* that represent real literacy in the world.

The difficulty of students bringing in texts from their 'real lives' for assessment remains a problem. While the text has achieved its purpose (e.g. minutes that reflect a meeting's content) it may not meet all the performance criteria. While some performance criteria may be met (and the text may include a great deal more besides) if all the criteria are not met, do I assess the text as "not yet competent"? I have great difficulty with this. If a text has clearly and effectively communicated to its audience in a workplace, how can I suggest changes? Shouldn't the CGEA reflect and value the literacy of the real world and not vice versa?

There are some "good parts" of the CGEA: project reports, moderation and discussions about administrative guidelines have provided practitioners with rare opportunities to share ideas and good practice. Moderation is perhaps the biggest bonus of the CGEA. Exposure to the knowledge and experience of other providers rekindles my enthusiasm and reassures me that I am not alone in my struggle to wrestle with the CGEA.

Professional development has never been so good! In our region, participants, having worked with the document for over a year and a half, are particularly well-informed. Sessions are stimulating exchanges in which we swap assessment tasks, discuss practical solutions to problems and critique the Certificate.

However the feedback from interregional moderation is less enlightening. The "annotated agreed variations" is a bandaid approach to a flawed document. How can the wording of an isolated performance criterion be changed, yet the confusing and narrowly focused 'practical purposes' domain remain intact? Will there be other variations from future moderations where more "warts" are uncovered? Will there be other "variations" and will we be having to refer to multiple documents to assess students' work?

The same interregional moderation urged us to "interpret the spirit"of the document.' I thought the move to CBT was to ensure validity and consistency across providers. I hope I interpret the 'spirit' of the CGEA the same way as others. Is a 'spirit'an assessable, demonstrable quality?

Attending recent professional development sessions has caused me to reflect on the

direction the field has taken with the implementation of the CGEA. Many individuals or small groups have been granted inadequate funding and too tight timelines to investigate and direct the field into the future. These budgets and timelines have not allowed widespread consultation, have meant projects have not been available to those implementing the CGEA by the deadlines, and access to these projects' reports and recommendations is not always easily available. Even the focus of some of the projects is questionable. Do ABE courses have to be matched and cross credited with all existing Victorian courses? It seems irrelevant to the needs of Ivanka who just wants to help her daughter with her homework. Other projects such as the soon to be released RPL seem to have lost sight of the needs of our client group. If any ABE student can successfully undertake the complex RPL process outlined, then automatically they are above Level 4 of the General Curriculum Option. Sometimes I come away from such sessions feeling that in our efforts to gain recognition for the field, we have lost sight of our client groups' needs.

While funding sources for projects is available, time release and money are still not available to allow teachers to participate in moderation and deliver or attend professional development. Much of the new information in the field is still disseminated around the photocopier or hurried informal exchanges in the corridor. While our Certificate may be accredited, much of the work implementing the CGEA has relied once more on the good will and voluntary time of those in the field.

I began this report with the statement that the CGEA has "good parts as well as bad". Yet when I reread my report I see I have written mainly about the bad. Perhaps this is revealing. It has been a demanding year implementing the Certificate and trying to maintain student confidence, enjoyment and direction, when I was not always certain of the direction the CGEA was taking me. Yet I am determined to continue with the Certificate and not just look to the National Framework as an answer. My resolution for 1995 is to focus more acutely on meeting learners' needs, rather than spending time battling college bureaucracy, translating obscure performance criteria and guiltily worrying that I had let a piece through knowing that performance criteria number 5 of element 4.7 had not been met.

2. THE NITTY GRITTY OF TEACHING WITH THE CGEA

Introduction
Through the process of maintaining my journal, a number of themes seem to have presented themselves again and again. For that reason this overview is theme/issue based and does not take into account the order in which these issues arose. Many of them lead from one to another but others arose then disappeared then came back again. Some ideas came up, then I changed my mind based on new experiences then other experiences made me reassess my original opinion. Overall I think the process of journal keeping allowed me to move beyond the general criticisms I had of the CGEA to the nitty-gritty of what makes it workable or unworkable.

The Group
My journalling was based on my experiences with a level 1 group, whom I taught for six hours a week during the period I kept my journal. The group was made up of eleven men and one woman. They were predominantly of ESB (English-Speaking Background). I was doing other teaching at the time but I wanted to focus exclusively on the effects of the implementation of the CGEA on level one provision as I think that many of the issues in level 1 are also present in the other levels but I have also been concerned about the lack of attention focussed on this group in analyses of ALBE practice. I also included in my journal my interactions with colleagues during this time and how they influenced my teaching and my attitude to the CGEA. I believe that this is important because the teachers I work with like to work as a team. We are very open with each other about our teaching and we often share resources and ideas with each other. So my impressions during the journalling were influenced by these interactions as well as by my interactions with my students.

Writing Independently
One of the issues that seemed to come up continually in my journal was the extent to which students need to be able to complete pieces of writing independently in order to reach competency level. This has emerged as extremely unclear with different reports coming back from moderations and professional development about some providers using exam conditions and others sending third and fourth drafts of pieces of work along to moderations which had been explicitly shaped by the exercise the teacher had constructed (and which the student would be unlikely to replicate outside a classroom situation).

When we first began looking at the Certificate we all talked a lot about how we wanted only to map the Certificate over our current teaching practice and still continue with our existing approach to 'good practice'. The problem now, however, is that if independent performances are required to exit level 1, then I think we are stuck with a contradiction that can't be worked around. In my experiences with this group over a period of time I have found that students require a certain amount of teacher support for almost all of their activities. When they have this level of support then I think that they are capable of dealing with much more text than is prescribed by the Certificate. I found through my teaching that it is extremely difficult to find authentic texts that are made up of only 1 - 2 sentences. It is almost as though level one of the Certificate has given birth to its own genre: the two sentence narrative.

In the past, teachers used (with level 1 students) all sorts of quite complex texts which they read aloud while the students followed. The problem is that level 1 readers and writers are not level 1 thinkers. They are able to handle difficult texts and answer quite complex comprehension questions based on text that has been read to them by the teacher, or that has been read with the assistance of the teacher, or that has been read in a group of students all helping each other out, or which has been played to them from a tape recorder. Students are also able to write quite complex texts by getting the teacher to scribe, by working collectively with other students and by sending pieces back and forth for teacher direction. Being able to do these things to me is a more significant achievement and a better use of time than being able to read two sentences or write two sentences independently which by their very size are unlikely to be socially powerful or relevant.

The idea in the Certificate that at level one you can read and write two sentences, at level 2 you can read and write a short paragraph and at level three you can read and write three to four paragraphs (and so on) seems to me to miss the point that literacy is about more than a very strict definition of independent reading and independent writing. I have come to this conclusion with my own group, after a period of teaching based on reduced texts and and asking the students to independently have a go at writing one to two sentences on a given topic. It got to the stage where students were rarely reading authentic texts and the writing they were doing seemed overly simplistic and worthless to them.

I have found it interesting, by way of comparison, that the National Framework document defines developing competency in terms of the movement from 'requiring support' to 'working independently', rather than in terms of the amount and complexity of the text involved.

Curriculum Guide or Assessment Tool ?

Another issue that constantly arose was the extent to which the document should be used as a curriculum guide and the extent to which it should be an assessment tool. If the level 1 module were to be used as a curriculum guide as I used it initially, the students would be learning a genre of writing that has no currency outside the classroom (as I've already pointed out). Much of my journal was about the responses of my colleagues and myself to the idea of using the Certificate to dictate practice, or else the possibility of mapping the Certificate over our existing good practice without altering it significantly.

When I first began working with the Certificate I was terrified of replicating 'school style' examinations. The last thing I wanted to do was repeat the same confidence destroying activities with which the students had already experienced a history of failure. For that reason I began to incorporate the Certificate into my everyday teaching, the idea being that I would just observe people's development inconspicuously and note down when they reached competency. The problem with this is that every lesson had to fit the criteria of the Certificate so that the work would go into someone's folio to enable them to access the Certificate. That lead to activities that resulted in a piece of independent writing and a piece of independent reading. During this time I became very disillusioned with my teaching practice. The students found producing these pieces of work patronising and useless.

It was difficult for them to experience a sense of success and development. It also required a stack of work on my part and led to a situation where texts were teacher-constructed most of the time. It also meant that I moved the students away from activities that broke up the text such as word games and word lists, 'cloze exercises' and visual literacy work. It also lead to less use of non-print text then I had previously used. This lack of authenticity became really worrying to me.

The result of this is that I have come almost full circle in my attitude towards assessment. I now concentrate on teaching. I use all sorts of texts and activities and rarely could the work that I set the students be used for assessment purposes for the reasons I've already outlined. When I feel that a student is ready to exit level 1, I would then give them activities to do that would allow them to demonstrate this competency. I would try and incorporate this assessment into the entire class so that they didn't feel singled out, but I would be quite explicit with them about the process. I feel that this is a reasonable compromise and it allows the student to say whether they want to go for the Certificate or not.

Having come to that conclusion, I'm conscious of the fact that assessment tasks take very little time at level 1. If a student can write "I don't think that people should smoke. It's bad for your health and you might get cancer" in order to reach competency in writing for 'public debate' at level 1, it isn't going to take much time for them to write a few sentences describing their childhood and thus reach competency for writing for 'self expression' at level 1. At levels 3 or 4, it might take weeks to draft and redraft a long essay about smoking or to write a lengthy narrative abut a childhood experience. Given that writing can no longer be based on personal opinion and familiar ideas at these higher levels and must in fact be heavily referenced and quote a wide range of sources, there must be an abundance of time spent researching for assessment pieces before they can actually be written. I think teachers working at these levels would have real difficulty avoiding using the CGEA as a curriculum guide as well as an assessment tool.

Wasted Time

I was struck when re-reading my journal by the amount of time that we have spent trying to come to terms with various aspects of the Certificate that should have been adequately devised and explained when it first arrived. The difficulty in deciding what constituted a curriculum guide and what constituted an assessment tool that I have outlined above took me and my colleagues an enormous amount of time to work through and who knows whether the approach I've come up with is adequate.

What protection do I have if future employers and colleagues interpret this document in a different way and demand a more rigorous and strictly defined usage? My colleagues and I have spent ages working out a system of assessment and placement only to have the assessment and placement project arrive with much higher demands for each of the levels. One of the texts that I have used as an assessment tool for level 2 appeared as an assessment tool for level 1. When the assessment and placement project was presented at a workshop I attended, I brought this up. I asked, if the Certificate at level 1 only requires a few short sentences about personally familiar material to reach competency, why, for the purposes of assessment and

placement would students be expected to read five paragraphs about an issue that is unlikely to be personally familiar in an environment where they already feel extremely threatened? I received a response of sorts but it was a moot point because the project was finished and the standards set, with all means of recourse closed off. I'm sure that this will be the case when many of the other projects become available. By saying this, I don't mean it as a criticism of the author of this or any other project.

My concern here is with the process by which projects come out months after practitioners have begun working with the CGEA. Given how confusing the document is I find this a terribly difficult situation. Similarly, an enormous amount of time has been spent trying to understand performance criteria that are extremely convoluted and unworkable only to have them change into 'agreed variations'. It has made me extremely suspicious of the value of using a certificate that is so flawed that it can't be implemented without having to rewrite it. Why put our students through all this when sections of the Certificate might have altered before you have the opportunity to put them to use. And if the Certificate is flawed, if it does need rewriting, why are we going through the farce of treating it as a completed document when it so obviously isn't. And if it is to be rewritten, why go through such a feeble process of slowly chipping away at the edges. It seems to me that what I've been going through is a trialling of the Certificate, only without the funding for a trial and under the pretence that we are just fine tuning a completed document.

Moderation and Professional Development

Through the journal writing process I have become aware of how much of the precious time that is set apart for professional development has been taken up by the CGEA. If this time were just being used to assess and moderate students' work I wouldn't mind so much but when it is spent doing the work of trialling a draft document then it becomes extremely problematic. What concerns me is the amount of other ideas and activities that weren't followed through because I was so busy dealing with the CGEA. Initially I was really happy that the CGEA moderation and professional development at least led to a situation where we could discuss our practice. However as time has gone on, the moderations have taken on a less enjoyable tone as we get down to the tin tacks of passing or failing students and, by extension, passing judgment on other teachers' practice. I have found many of the professional development sessions that I detailed in the journal were quite negative and I often found it extremely difficult not to take it too personally when my students work was assessed as not quite at competency standard. I found it hard to separate these judgments from my feelings towards the student. The whole idea of denying someone a certificate because they don't fulfil one or two very narrow performance criteria when they can do a thousand other brilliant things since they first arrived in class still really irks me.

Overview

Overall my journalling of CGEA practice has unearthed more negative experiences than positive ones. The implementation has at times made me question my own abilities as a teacher and put my students into a position where their feelings about course content had to sit second to a set of criteria dictated by people who don't know them or me and who have imposed a half - baked, unworkable system upon us.

3. A BETTER INFORMED TEACHER, BUT A MORE ANXIOUS ONE

What I teach must be relevant to the interests of my students and their life contexts. It must be accessible, and link to previous knowledge and experience. I aim to provide meaningful learning outcomes that fit in with critical literacy principles, so that if we are discussing an issue which is current in the media, then students will feel they can participate in the issue by writing letters to the editor, linking the debate into their own life context, researching, ringing people etc.

I believe that if this is so, that if the topic or context is relevant, then learning will occur, thinking will be stimulated, ideas will be provoked and challenged. In order to challenge and provoke I facilitate as many group discussions as possible so that a broad a range of opinions, ideas, and knowledge can be thrown into the ring.

I don't consider myself to be the most expert in the room, and am often learning heaps myself. I may go into the classroom with a script of what might happen, but it rarely goes to plan and I like to go with the flow. I am alert to opportunities for highlighting or making explicit what skills we are using or learning, but these are not the focus.

It has been my experience that there needs to be a purpose for skills before one is motivated to acquire them - the thinking and the discussion stimulate a desire to express and then we seek the means. It is a bit like painting - I see something I want to paint, I look at it a while, I think about it, I see it from various viewpoints and in different lights and then I tentatively begin. I use the techniques I know, but they are not always enough so then I have to learn more.

And so it goes for writing. Writing, I believe, arises out of motivation to express. This motivation comes through reading, through discussion, through observation of life and linking in our thoughts and experience. Reading is then enhanced in this circular process.

Specifically, what I teach is negotiated out of the context of my students' interests and expressed wants and needs. Topics are usually selected in the same way and very often based upon current social issues in the media. For many of my students, being able to critically engage with the media is a priority. Often, students will come to learn because they want to 'stimulate the brain', 'brush away the cobwebs', and be to confident in their opinions.

I have been working with a level 4 group at an inner suburban TAFE college and at an outer suburban TAFE college. The group at the inner suburban campus consists of both men and women of mixed ages, whilst the group at the outer suburban campus is predominantly aged 35 plus and all women. These two groups are vastly different in their goals and purposes for learning, their socio-economic backgrounds, their life experiences. I can't plan to approach lessons in the same way for both groups, and what works for one would rarely work for the other.

With the outer suburban group I can assume that they watch the news on T.V. regularly, read the local paper each issue, care about education, believe that they could

go on to further study, that they see themselves as active in the world, even if that is only in their own home environment.

With the inner suburban group, I was struck by their lack of personal empowerment. I was struck by their blind faith in the media and by their lack of general knowledge and so assumptions about basic concepts could never be made. An excellent example of this was when, at the beginning of semester 2, I was looking for a socially interesting topic that was current in the media. The Republican issue cropped up in the holidays and I happened to tape a debate on T.V. that put both sides to a jury. I assumed that the group would know that we had a Constitution, that we were separate from England in our government and had been since the early 1900s. They in fact had never heard of a constitution and didn't have any conception of what it might visually look like. How the Queen fitted into our government was a mystery, and why this was important was totally lost. I ditched the lesson after half an hour and we went on to something else. What I had seen was real panic in the eyes of some of my students - was this going to be another lesson in failure and stupidity! I had chosen that topic because it fitted so well into the domain of public debate and the reading text (the video), so clearly into the competencies. It was really unsuitable, and thus I learnt through this disaster that I must not let the competencies drive my selection of texts or topics. This same text had worked well at the outer suburban campus by the way.

How do I teach?
I don't pretend to be an expert, and in fact it is very empowering for my students to be consulted by me on matters of spelling, knowledge about topics, origins of words, possible avenues for research, relevant life experiences. I respect my students unconditionally, and am interested in all comments they bring to the classroom. I hope that they see the classroom as a safe place to try out conversations, test out ideas, raise issues etc. and to question and to ask. I believe I must always be honest, and that often involves admitting ignorance. I try to model what I believe are the traits of a good learner - a willingness to find out and to try. I believe that learning should foremost be enjoyable in order for motivation to occur. I try to plan out lessons a bit like dinner parties, in that I try to anticipate what will be fun, be stimulating and what will be positive and build in success. I try to enhance students' self esteem always through my own positive regard for them, but also through helping them to access the learning process so that they are successful. I praise everything, and look always for the positive in what is said or done.

In plannning a class I will have a topic in mind (if we aren't following on) and some stimulus text for this that might be a video or a speaker or a newspaper article or story etc. I will have planned some focusing questions and generally get the group to discuss these in small groups before tackling them as a whole group. Writing usually arises out of the reading and the discussion, which provides the purpose for the writing.

How have the competencies impacted on my practice?
In thinking about this I am thinking back to what and how I taught before the CGEA. I taught level 4 students back then, but I was not so rigorous in covering

the domains highlighted by the Certificate. I tended to focus a lot on argumentative writing, a bit of creative/personal expression and a bit of knowledge. I taught more along the lines of what explicit skills the particular group wanted, what would stimulate them to think, to discuss, to engage in learning and then link the skills to that. We would scaffold up through personal expression, to researching, to using the research as evidence to writing in public debate. Everything was interrelated and much more thematic, and less compartmentalised as separate competencies.

I think that this approach was better. I like the way the competencies have stimulated my thinking about genre. I like them as a framework for developing curriculum, but as a set of competencies for assessment they are too prescriptive.

Because my students are at exit level 4 they are entitled to get the Certificate at the end of the year if they meet the competencies. This has created enormous pressure on the curriculum and classroom practise this semester, as I am very conscious of failing in my obligation to my students if I do not create opportunities which will enable them to gain it if possible. I am also acutely aware of how easy it would be to engineer a folio for some students. To what end, I have bitterly asked myself, when all we are ending up with is a rod for the bureaucratic system to beat us with.

The competencies are a measurable way of documenting if our students have gained mastery of certain 'skills'. As such, they could all too easily lead to teaching transmission style. It leads to a concern for the product and not for the process. I think this is a real danger. This was highlighted for me in my struggle with the 'practical purposes' domain.

Everything I have tried to do in 'practical purposes' had failed dismally as it had been dull, dry, artificial and not linked in any way to authentic real life experience... until a lucky break at the end of term 3. Teaching the genres of reading and writing in practical purposes had not worked for me in the past as they seemed to be something I had to teach 'chalk and talk' style; most texts seemed to be in a written format unfamiliar in everyday contexts. I was constantly worrried about the structure of the writing, so the stimulation from the discussion and the thinking became a secondary focus. I was worried about losing control of the situation as it was an area I wasn't comfortable in. I felt I didn't know where it would lead, yet I was trying to fit the teaching and learning into the prescribed criteria. In short, in this domain I was the flip side to all I believed was good practice in teaching.

My success in this area occurred when we took a genre that my students and I had some real life knowledge of (however scant) and could apply it to a situation where we had knowledge and opinion. This turned out to be 'minute taking' and we were the 'Stop Violence Committee'. Through this experience I have learned how important it is to stick to methodologies that are based on principles of learning. I have also learned that I am letting the Certificate make me very anxious and that this is affecting my classroom practice. There is a danger that the competencies can drive the curriculum, however hard we try to resist this happening. If we say (with principle and with arrogance) that we will throw the Certificate out the window and get back to 'good practice', what then of our obligations to the students who want and expect to get the Certificate?

Finally, on the positive side, the competencies have supplied a useful basis for dialogue and professional development with other teachers that I value highly. It has made me more aware of how to deconstruct a teaching process and in focussing on the competencies, how to teach genre more explictly. Therefore, I believe I am a better informed teacher, but I am also a more anxious one!

Finally, to address the key questions, here are my thoughts:

The competency framework has affected my teaching practice in a positive way in that it has made me more rigorous in covering the four domains. It has given me a dialogue and common ground with other teachers, as well as helping me to deconstruct my teaching processes and to be able to be more explicit about the genre of those processes.

However, it has placed enormous pressure on me both administratively and for outcomes which I think impact negatively on my students. Also in the beginning it made me worried about the performance criteria and affected my confidence in myself as a teacher.

It is possible to go with the flow with a group or topic and then look back and fit this retrospectively around the performance criteria? I now do this all the time. However it took 18 months before I felt I knew the Certificate well enough not to worry about it any more.

I would hate the Certificate to drive the curriculum and to lose the focus of students' authentic needs. I see a danger in people new to the Certificate picking it up in this way.

What works and what doesn't as far as classroom practice goes is still the same. I think the framework needs to be gone over with a fine tooth comb when it comes up for re-accreditation!

In some cases fulfilling the assessment criteria for the Certificate means setting tasks which are not relevant and are artificial and boring to students.

Finally, what of the broadening of outlook and the learners' ability to become more independent? What of issues of raised self-esteem and confidence, of students engaging in the world about them and opening up new worlds? Where do these dimensions of good practice fit in with our competency-based world?

4. THE CGEA NEGLECTS THE JOY OF LEARNING

Preamble
This report is based on my work with a Return to Study group of 7 women, whose ages range from 25-62.

Their reasons for enrolling in the CGEA course include considering enrolling in further study, wishing to demonstrate to their children that education is important, wishing to improve their memory, or just enjoying the company of other students.

The group meets for 3 hours per week and the course, which includes all four streams of the Certificate, goes for 20 weeks. The students are of mixed ability and are around levels 3 - 4.

The issues that have arisen for me in implementing the CGEA are:

1. The language of the document
2. Compartmentalisation of the framework
3. Difficulties with assessment
4. Relevance of the four literacies
5. Relevance of the performance criteria
6. Lack of cohesion in the document

The language of the document
Trying to explain the Certificate to students is quite difficult. The language used to outline performance criteria is not easily accessible to students, or to teachers for that matter!

The document should be written for students, after all they are the ones who are undertaking the course and they need to know what is expected of them to successfully complete the course.

The document as it stands at present has to be interpreted by the teacher and moderation sessions reveal that there is not even clear agreement as to the meaning of some parts of the document among teachers. Most students become intimidated by the wording of the document as it currently stands and it does not offer a supportive framework to reduce student anxiety over expectations.

My practice encourages self-assessment by students; I expect students to appraise their own work and to be able to evaluate their work critically for themselves. This is difficult to promote when the language of the document is so complex and the students find it difficult to describe their achievements in terms meaningful to them.

Compartmentalisation of the framework
I find a fragmented approach to teaching creeps into my practice as I try to ensure that the integrity of the Certificate is maintained. The overall intention of the Certificate model is for students to demonstrate competency in participating in social life (as is explained in the *Background Works).* However in order for students to

demonstrate competency in all the performance criteria, the 'whole' must be broken into bits. Often this results in contrived and fragmented sessions.

It seems good practice to me to tackle the streams of literacy, oracy and numeracy at the same time because through using listening, talking, reading and writing practice and sharing experiences students are able to make more sense of their learning. I believe a holistic approach provides greater opportunity for students to each meet their individual needs; morover, it is sensible to encourage learning in different areas at the same time.

In order to work on all streams simultaneously, it is necessary to slot the students into the Certificate framework, rather than the other way around. This generates a plethora of records.

A difficulty for me, as the teacher, has been coming to an understanding of how the document can be used holistically.

Difficulties with assessment

It is necessary to design assessment tasks to enable students to demonstrate competency in all performance criteria. Teaching the full range of domains and levels, I try to offer open-ended assessment tasks which will cover a number of streams and allow students to demonstrate competency at their level, rather than one which has been pre-determined by the Certificate. This becomes quite a nightmare!

Balancing good assessment design, with the time available for a sessional tutor (not allowing the Certificate to encroach too much into personal time) is a challenge! What can the teacher do when students loosely interpret the task to suit their own purposes? The fault is often not with their work and not with the assessment design either; the fault lies with the performance criteria which are not always relevant to the students' needs.

Open-ended tasks do not always direct students to specific competencies which must be met. On the other hand, the need to meet the competencies does not allow students to take an independent approach.

Competency-based assessment does neglect the personal development aspect which is acknowledged in the *Background Works* as "traditionally an ALBE aim." Competency-based assessment does not take into account the point the person has come from and the learning the individual has done. Hence, individual development is not properly recognised in the certification process. On the other hand, the predetermined levels do not reflect the needs of the majority of students.

Assessment hangs over my head and the heads of the students. They need to know where they stand but this also neglects the joy of learning. The process does not take into account individual strengths and weaknesses.

Relevance of the 'four literacies'

I have found it a good practice to examine and to work with the four different literacies (the domains). Ensuring that the different literacies are tried is valuable in

broadening the students' experiences. The framework of the Certificate enables this to occur. The students tend to enjoy 'self expression' more than the other three and feel more comfortable with this style of writing and reading. They may in fact be well practised in this area and tend not to be as competent in 'practical purposes' or 'knowledge'. I have found it necessary to give more practice time to build up the students' skills in these areas, yet they do not always see them as relevant to their lives and future directions. (Obviously this depends on the reason for them undertaking the Certificate in the first place.) The Certificate is often not able to help students work towards their personal goals.

Another problem is that individual students will be at different levels in each of the four domains. 'Public debate', particularly in oracy, requires a certain degree of confidence for students to express their opinion and outline their arguments coherently. For many students, this takes time to develop, and the Certificate as it stands gives no credit for such developing confidence. For some students the personal growth has to be enormous and for others it is not such a challenge.

Texts do not always fall into the clear identification of the literacies either, as is acknowledged in the *Background Works*. There can and should be overlap. Why then should the performance criteria be so inflexible , and not cater for texts or for students' writing which does not fit neatly into the compartments?

Relevance of the performance criteria

The students who fulfil the assessment tasks to the letter may be restricted in terms of what else they might have explored in their writing. If they do not comply with the instructions because they see a different purpose, or they have a strong desire to explore different interpretation, a better piece of work may result. This may be more valuable to the students but it may not meet the performance criteria.

The prescribed performance criteria do not necessarily challenge individuals and on the contrary are sometimes far too simple.

Lack of cohesion in the document

The different streams interpret the guidelines in different ways so that the document is very confusing.

There is far too much to read in the support material which often gives differing interpretations of the framework itself. The support material (the Assessment Kit, Moderation Kit, etc.) have come out too late to actually provide teachers support. They have become another burden in a messy, flawed process.

Concluding remarks

In my experience, I have found the CGEA to be irrelevant for students. They have a desire to learn, a desire to experience schooling that they may have missed out on. The course document is not compatible with the students' stated goals and/or their desired learning outcomes. The Certificate messes up a valuable learning experience.

5. FIRES IN THE IMAGINATION, OR BUCKETS OF BUSY WORK?

The question of how the CGEA has impacted upon my teaching is an interesting one. Since the first consultation on the framework for an ALBE certificate took place (in 1991) I have taken a keen and active interest in its development. Despite having some misgivings about the implications of accreditation for adult literacy students, I was prepared to put those concerns to one side and look at the positives of the Certificate, of which there are many. These have been well- documented in the literature circulated by ACFE and the many projects funded to assist with the implementation.

The framework upon which the Certificate is founded provided practioners with a broad definition of literacy, one which incorporated the notion of critical literacy. The four literacies accommodate the value and purpose of literacy in various contexts: the personal. the practical, the academic, the political. The framework provides a basis for discussing what we mean by 'literacy' and how adults can best learn in the ALBE, ESL or ESL literacy classroom. It describes **some** of the complex skills being developed by the adult learner.

As the result of a period of extensive consultation and trialling of the reading and writing competencies (in the original form that they appeared in in the ABEAF framework) these were generally understood and were widely accepted by practitioners. The oral communication and general curriculum option stream on the other hand had not had the benefit of extensive research or trialling and I anticipated that changes would need to be made.

My interest in the Certificate was theoretical as I was particularly interested in the inclusion of oral communications skills, a relatively new area of interest to the field but one which I had explored through my own post-graduate research in secondary schools. Whilst I could see the weaknesses in the Certificate in terms of pedagogical theory and its implications for teaching practice, I thought I would be able to accommodate the Certificate in the pragmatic way that teachers often accommodate 'new improved versions' of what went before.

The big thing the Certificate had going for it was that it was just that, something which had some authority. It gave us authority. It gave students authority... authority to say they had completed an educational course and hence been 'accepted into the fold'. I would never deny students access to accreditation, so maybe a compromise was required. One can always do a little more paper work, go to a few more meetings; it's good to have the time to talk with other teachers about our work. Sure, some positive things can come from moderation.

I accepted that there might be teething problems and that some of the procedures for implementation would require modification and then fine tuning. I was realistic about the time required to implement such a curriculum innovation. It's often difficult to see how something will work in practice so I was happy to incorporate aspects of the framework into my teaching until further information arrived about the administrative and accreditation requirements for its implementation.

My concern with the Certificate was that teachers may become preoccupied with the performance criteria, range and conditions required to demonstrate competence (in various genres related to the four literacies) in speaking and writing. They would possibly be diverted from the real business of teaching students: for example, how to think through and to direct problem-posing and problem-solving discussion; how to introduce activities which make the learning processes explicit to the learner.

Some of the skills described in the oral competencies of the CGEA are skills which are required for classroom discussion and learning to take place. On this basis, I thought it might be possible to accommodate the performance criteria of the oracy stream into a broader program of what I call "talking to learn". I wanted to believe that one could simply map my existing practice into the Certificate with minor compromises and a bit more record-keeping.

However, 'mapping' my usual practice onto the Certificate turned out to be quite problematic. Many classes start with a loose structure and become something else with the input of the participants. Whilst we might not always feel in control when immersed in the cut and thrust of dialogue with students in the classroom, the learning process may become apparent in retrospect. In writing about the experience subsequently, the order and structure which may not be initially apparent in a dynamic classroom situation can emerge. Reflective writing by teachers can provide the opportunity to spell out what was informing one's (intuitive) contribution to the process. It's sometimes surprising to see the logic and purpose intrinsic in practical classroom interactions being revealed in this way. This process is the opposite of what we are being asked to do with the CGEA!

Teaching for me has never been a practice isolated from other parts of my life. It is my life as much as any other part of my life. The teacher brings everything that they are and do to the classroom. We teach according to who we are, what we are told to teach, what we believe we should be teaching and what the students want to learn. When we assess our students we also assess ourselves. That's what the assessment task is about.

In term two of 1994 when I was teaching to the "spirit" of the CGEA my curriculum reflected each of the four domains. We were uncertain of what was expected of us procedurally (in terms of record-keeping, form-filling, certification and so forth). We were engaged in considerable public debate about the value of the CGEA and were trying to deal with issues that it raises such as the relative importance of form and substance and where 'knowledge' actually comes from.

At that time, my class and I went on a 'dream vacation'. I wrote this reflective piece which captures the kind of teaching and learning that I feel most strongly about, an approach which integrates learning with life itself... and how teaching to the CGEA might impact on this.

Sometimes when I'm in my class I wish I was somewhere else: maybe a tropical island or even a Bohemian cafe. When that happens I know it's because I'm not really there, not really teaching, not really interacting with my students, not really

thinking about how it is and what it is that we are learning. On one such occasion, the first day back after a term break, I decided to share my desire to be elsewhere with my students. They all agreed. It's funny how many people would rather be elsewhere when they are cooped up in a classroom trying to learn. I told them I hadn't really had a holiday, gotten away from it all as it were. This was why I was dreaming of wonderful exotic places when I should be planning our term's work.

What came from this inspired confession was a most enjoyable research project that the students worked on enthusiastically for a term (10 weeks) in our 4 hour per week literacy class. The point of the story is that this is not a systematic piece of curriculum design derived from using a model that 'incorporates competencies within the four domains in an integrated way across two streams' or whatever. It was not a carefully mind-mapped plan following a precise list of competencies to be achieved. The ideas did not arise out of a process of systematic curriculum planning; however it could very well be written up as a successful activity linking literacy, numeracy, oral communication and a general curriculum option called 'geography' or 'world affairs'.

The 'dream vacation' project was the product of an experienced teacher who has worked in a variety of contexts, with a large number of very different people, and who sees teaching and learning as an interactive process; a process that treats the learner as an equal partner in the exchange of skills, ideas and knowledge. Such a teaching and learning process reflects a pedagogy in which the teacher creatively utilises her 'bag of tricks' (curriculum models; theories of language and learning; knowledge of various disciplines such as history, politics and sociology; practical techniques for teaching different skills, etc) as well as a genuine desire to share her knowledge with students in a way which encourages them to see the learning they do in the classroom as a natural part of life.

> *So where would you go if you had the money? Just imagine if you could plan a trip, for say three months, anywhere in the world. Let's say you can go to at least three different countries. Of course you have to plan it very carefully to make sure you can do all the things in your dream. Where would you go and what would you need to know about this place before you got there?*
>
> *Everyone loves talking about the weather but this is one instance where you really need to know whether it's likely to be snowing or sweltering when you get there. What's the best time to visit? What's happening in the country? Festivals, holidays, civil war? Is it a safe place to visit ? What are the customs? What about dress, courtesy, religion etc.? What about the food? Will you be able to eat it? What do you want to see in this country? Art, history, religion, architecture, music, sport?*
>
> *Once you have gathered as much information as you can about the countries you hope to visit, you have to work out what you can realistically see in three months. Do you want to take a package tour or go on your own or do you want a combination of the two? Maybe you have relatives and friends to visit, maybe you want to spend some time just stopping still in some gorgeous village by the*

sea and not go sight-seeing all the time... but then will you regret it if you don't see what there is to see?

Travel agents just love to talk to people about these kinds of decisions. They have lots of colourful brochures to entice you to all sorts of places. How do you decide and should you believe everything the travel agents say? It might be worth checking the paper to see if there's a war going on, or some hostages have been taken during an innocent sight-seeing tour. Never rely on one source of information. So you need to use libraries, travel agents, friends, newspapers, travel programs on the T.V. Read, look, talk and listen. Write away for information. Interview people who have travelled to these countries. Talk to your friends and find out what they know. The more information the better...

Then there's the money! How much will the airfares cost; travel around the country- train, boat, plane, bus, car, rickshaw. What about food, accomodation, entertainment, entrance to places of interest: how much money will you need? Travel insurance? Luggage? What if you're driving? How long will it take to get from one place to another? How much will petrol cost? There's lots of counting and calculation to do....

Before you start finding out this information write down your dreams of where you'd like to go and what you'd like to see and do. It can be like a plan in which the details can be filled out as new information is gained. Once you have found out everything you need. you can explain to the whole class what you intend to do on your dream vacation. You can be the teacher and tell us what you have learned. You could use books, maps, wall charts, music, video, postcards to show some of the things you might do. The written assignment can be submitted after the show...

Everyone had a great time doing this and we visited many countries in our dreams. I'll leave it to you, the reader of this tale, to "spot the competencies" as they were performed in the course of a wide range of activities stimulated by this research project.

And then in term three, the reality of the need to assess tasks hit home. One must do justice to what one's students have achieved in terms of competencies, levels, moderation requirements, range and conditions. Down to earth we came with something of a thud. The "spirit" of the CGEA was being documented, recorded, systematized, moderated and pulled into line. So instead of reflective, inspirational writing about my experiences in the classroom I had to start writing assessment tasks. I had to prove to my peers that I was teaching and assessing the competencies, elements, streams, domains.

Writing an assessment task is not as easy as one first imagines. Contextualizing the task is important. I try to think of what to leave out. The teacher either 'assists' or 'intervenes'. I had never thought of my interaction with students as one or the other. I wonder how my theory that teaching is a continuing dialogue with students, can be accomodated under 'extent of teacher intervention or assistance'? We are expected to make the task clear in terms of meeting the prescribed

criteria for elements covered. We quickly realize that all the competencies required at a particular level and element are not acquired or demonstrated within one task. Students may demonstrate competence at varying degrees of the spectrum of a particular level or varying degrees of competence with different criteria. The assessment task becomes more problematic.

How much contextualizing does moderation require? How many assessment tasks is one meant to write? I am faced with the problem of having to cover all the performance criteria in each element in the one assessment task. How does one write a 'dream vacation' assessment task ? In fact one would need to break down the instructions given to students, **dis**-integrate them as it were, redefine them in terms of the competencies described in the Certificate, write several discrete tasks and assess them as they are demonstrated. Separate and systemize elements of the whole and you will have anything but a 'dream vacation', even in the imagination!

The Dream Vacation task in fact crossed four domains, a couple of streams and a few levels. After all that hard work why would one have to write an assessment task? To make sure we really did it? So should I keep teaching the way I always have, or should I modify my practice to make it easier to fit in with the requirements of the Certificate?

I realize that my concerns as a teacher are changing with every assessment task I write. No time to reflect upon practice by using theory to illuminate common sense perceptions of the classroom. There's no time to explore new ideas, approaches, ways of saying understanding, critically analysing. That's all 're-inventing the wheel'. The Certificate gives me a common language so I can talk to other practitioners. It gives me names for the things I see my students doing. It tells me how I should assess my students' performances. It implies what I should teach. The pedagogical message of the Certificate is clear. It doesn't matter what people learn as long as they prove it by **demonstrating the prescribed performance criteria and element for the right stream!**

Shades of Orwell's 1984 swirl around the teachers' assessment folders as they struggle to memorize, internalize, adopt the new language: 'Certificate speak...'

> *Bonzetta, in an unfamiliar situation, when it is raining, with two or three persons unknown to her, can utter three coherent sentences about the weather ...*

It is easy to poke fun at the absurd common language that we are asked to speak but my real concern is that it undervalues teacher skill and it patronises students. It patronises students because it encourages teachers to set achievable, definable, simple tasks, tasks they know students can perform.

> *Bonzetta can organize a birthday party for her daughter (incorporating the four domains).*

The fact is that Bonzetta could probably do that without enrolling in the CGEA but there are certainly a lot of other things that Bonzetta might like to learn.

Challenging new knowledge and skills, things for which she might not be able to meet all the criteria. Things that might not be easily described in an assessment task nor demonstrated in practice. The things that adults come back to school to learn: all the stuff they don't know about, such as economics, politics, geography, history, current affairs, the language of the dominant culture.

I find the Certificate quite restrictive to good teaching and unecessarily bureaucratic but in the end the inventive pragmatist in me will find ways of minimizing the impact of accountability procedures and I will continue to utilize an extensive teaching repertoire developed over the years through critically reflective practice, to go on lighting fires in the imagination rather than filling buckets with busy work.

6. HOLISM, REDCUTIONISM AND THE SUZUKI METHOD

Introduction
The introduction of the CGEA has had a considerable impact on the ALBE field. Subconsciously or consciously, we as teachers have felt the pressure. We have had a new focus imposed on our practice, one which has not always blended well with the politics and principles of the field. We have had to introduce the CGEA and have had to have certain (if unspecified) numbers of students doing it. It has affected curriculum, classroom activities and professional development.

The CGEA has added the dimensions of moderation and the assessment of 'competence' to our teaching. Students are now assessed for purposes other than placement and regardless of psychosocial factors. Its implementation has not been accompanied and supported by thorough and consistent statewide guidelines on procedures and processes, so there has been considerable uncertainty.

This report will discuss the CGEA in the early stages of its implementation. I will discuss its impact on my teaching in the light of my teaching journal, and will draw on my own current experience as an adult learner of piano.

The characteristics of adult literacy learners
Any credential carries with it a pressure to perform or to achieve. Many adult literacy students have felt all too acutely the pressure to perform throughout their previous educational experience. With the introduction of the CGEA, I have been concerned that if teachers become too focused on the achievement of a credential, pressure will be felt by students, including those on whom such pressure would have a negative impact. As Margaret Curlewis in her document 'An Adult Literacy to VCE Pathway' (1993) wrote, "Students whose perceptions of education were totally negative may begin to view their achievements more positively." "The very act of learning to be literate has an enormous impact on their self- esteem and social behaviour. Horizons expand, political awareness is fostered and feelings of inadequacy are reduced."

In any program for adult literacy students, there needs to be flexibility enough for this process of growth and self-exploration and development to take place.

The students upon whom this reflection is based are members of an 'ESL literacy' class of ten students. The majority are retired women who migrated to Australia in the 1950s and 1960s. They have grown-up children and have often expressed a desire to learn English now that they have time for themselves. Many conversations among the students focus on their regret at their level of English 'after all these years in Australia'. On one level they know that this is due to their limited early years of education, as well as the economic hardship and lack of opportunity for education they experienced previously as migrants. On another level they blame themselves. This perception of themselves as poor learners runs deep, so it is with tentative steps during their early days in a class that they slowly become aware of new and expanded horizons.

My reflection for this report includes reflection on my own processes of learning

as an adult learner. The approach through which I am learning has a lot in common with approaches used in adult literacy. I am learning to play the piano through the Suzuki approach, which is based on the way children learn the mother tongue. Fundamental to the Suzuki method is the belief that anyone can learn. According to Shinichi Suzuki , "any child, properly trained, can develop musical ability just as all children in the world have developed the ability to speak their mother tongue".

For me, it is this belief in one's ability to learn, however late and whatever the starting point in terms of confidence or skill, which shapes the whole learning process. As with adult literacy students, my return to learning piano took a lot of courage. The teacher asked me what I could play. I sat down, braced myself and began to play a piece. After a couple of bungled attempts at the first few lines I could go no further. I carried with me a mild sense of failure at not being able to play anything despite my learning as a child. However, I was motivated by a powerful urge to play music. This kind of deeply-felt motivation is something I have seen in adult literacy students. Inspired by the courage I have seen in my students, I allowed myself to embark on the learning process without too much self-criticism, judgement and internalised expectation of 'what adults should be able to do' by a certain age. Many adult students make their learning process more difficult by being their own worst critics. On one level I knew all this, but I had to learn to apply it to my own learning. Effective learning demands space for trial, error and practice. Successes, however small, must be acknowledged. A positive environment, encouragement and support are vital.

Competence - holistic or reductionist?

A major concern of mine during the introduction of the CGEA has been the shift in focus away from the "whole" task and onto the "parts" of a task. A good task with clear educational merit is required to undergo further scrutiny as to whether it enables the student to demonstrate a number of performance criteria, some of which have been acknowledged by the field to be faulty and are in the process of being amended. Nevertheless these performance criteria, with periodic "agreed annotated variations" are what we have had to work with to date, and they have led to a great deal of anxiety. In some ways it has felt like a peripheral focus, and sometimes a distraction from the real program. The following example from my diary demonstrates a very important event in the students' learning, but which in most cases did not (without major and distracting reworking) enable students to meet all the required performance criteria.

> *Last week was our AGM. It was an extraordinary night due to the degree of student involvement. A number of the students from the class participated in a presentation about their respective travels. Four members of the class got up and spoke in front of a crowd of about a hundred people. It was wonderful. You could feel the excitement in the air. 'Anita' had redrafted a piece about migrant women learning, which she had written previously. Feedback from the class had led her to cut the original down for the oral presentation, focus on the section about herself and link the two sections more effectively. This was a further draft of an already finalized piece of writing, but the oral purpose made it necessary." Diary entry 21/9/94*

The public performance of these women was wonderful. It was fun, it was encouraging to other students, it gave the other students an insight into their lives and it was useful to our program in terms of public relations. In contrast to any reductionist approach to competency based learning, it demanded competence in a holistic sense. The performance was purposeful and meaningful. Competency -based learning in itself is not necessarily a flawed concept, but unless one keeps in mind that the whole is more than the sum of the parts, the learning task can become vacuous. This is particularly so when the parts which are valued are only those parts which it is possible to quantify. It would be absurd to imagine a Suzuki teacher thinking in the following terms (which I have extrapolated from the CGEA) and which certainly describe aspects of the required performance in the first book:

Play a piece at least half a page long.
Use melody in the treble clef played by the right hand.
Use an alberti base played by the left hand.
Play in C major.

Suzuki method is based on a set of graded books through which students can progress. Competence in the first enables one to approach the second. Quality of musical performance is required right from the first piece of music. Mastery of the first skill is as vital as those later on, and acts as a base for later work. The competence (which is no doubt the aim) is by no means defined in a reductionist way; it is never reduced to the sum of the parts. It demands a total performance of the piece of music, paying attention to every detail.

One fundamental strength of the CGEA is its 'Background Works' (developed two years earlier for the Adult Basic Education Accreditation Framework Project) which defines literacy in a number of ways. The notion upon which the reading and writing competence statements are based is that comprehensive literacy may be defined in terms of four key contemporary social contexts in which literacy exists. These four key contexts have become the four domains, termed 'literacy as self-exploration', as 'procedure', as 'knowledge' and as 'public debate'. Prior to the CGEA, the adult literacy field had at times been criticised for a tendency to concentrate on the aspect of 'self-esteem' and psychological states of learners, leading to an emphasis on 'literacy as self-exploration'. The broadened notion of four distinct literacies is useful, but again, we must be mindful not to slip into the trap of becoming reductionist, as is often the case when something is boxed so neatly. Whilst it is possible to make distinctions between the domains to some extent, it is important to remember that the domains should not be regarded as finite or discrete as each of them merges with the others.

Curriculum

For me as a teacher, the CGEA framework has been very useful as a curriculum "map". This is more to do with the 'Background Works' than the accreditation framework itself. I have found it useful to overlay my curriculum onto the CGEA framework (which becomes a curriculum "map") in order to chart some areas which I may not have focused on previously.

In addition, my students are developing a language for analysing the purpose of a

text, which is inspired by the CGEA framework . An example of this is given in an extract from my journal (13-10-94):

> *...we went on to read the articles in the TWT [The World Times student newspaper] issue on `water', discussing each one in terms of its purpose as a text... considering whether its purpose was to give information or to try and influence someone's thinking. I chose a series of extracts from the articles we had read in the paper and we analysed them in terms of their purpose and language features. Were they fact or opinion? It was a new concept to most of the group but they had the idea by the time we finished... this class was incredibly stimulating.*

The writing task which followed was also influenced by the CGEA:

> *...Knowing that students hadn't done much 'writing for knowledge' and that this demanded a different way of looking at things, I encouraged them to consider writing an informative piece for the Year Book, based on something they had read in TWT. They were to select five facts relating to a topic, sequence them into an appropriate order and use connectors where necessary to make them read as a short factual report. First, I modelled one (devised by the group) about Melbourne Water, going through the process of brainstorming, mind mapping and sequencing of ideas. We discussed the audience, language features and purpose.... "*

Giving feedback to students

The framework of the CGE has assisted me in giving feedback to students. An example of this from my recent journal is of a student who had had terrible trouble with her writing. In fact, her spelling, handwriting, conceptual level and ability to complete anything very structured was excellent, but she had maintained all year that she couldn't write and would get a terrible headache when she tried to.

> *With my help she had written a couple of sentences to describe some photos of a trip to her birthplace in Indonesia. Along with some other students in the class she had got up at the AGM in front of about 100 people and read her work. Inspired by other students' feedback she had gone away and redrafted her sentences and written a very informative and interesting piece about her trip. She read it out to us and was greeted with great showers of praise and congratulations. I seized the opportunity to encourage her to put it in for accreditation in the CGEA. In giving feedback I was able to draw on the performance criteria at different levels saying that the piece was already a very good level 2 piece and if she wanted to redraft it giving some other people's points of view it would easily be level 3. The very next class she had included the points of view of her 84 year old mother and her Australian friends who had gone with her.*

Incidentally, this proved to be a turning point for her as she is now engaged in the task of writing an informational piece about Chinese wedding traditions, based on some photos she had brought in.

Choice and negotiation

A further diary entry:

I reintroduced the CGE today, first day of term 4, reminding the group that what they have done all year ties in with it. I explained that they would need to submit four completed pieces of work, one from each domain. I said that I was sure that everyone could do it; it was just what they were already doing. Gina and Hatice simultaneously said, "Except for me!" But my reading of the situation was that everyone was alert, interested and smiling with what I interpreted as enthusiasm. I encouraged them to 'have a go' but did not call for a commitment yet as I wanted to reduce the pressure on them. I hope as weeks go by they will see the value of handing in work for assessment.

For many adult literacy students, taking responsibility for their learning is part of a much broader change in their self-perception and growth. In my mind it was essential to be able to offer students an option which they were free to take up or ignore. This leaves the responsibility in the hands of the learner. It also respects them as adult learners who know what they are looking for. I believe that my teaching expertise has the most value if my students understand what I am doing and why. So it was imperative that a process of communication or negotiation take place whereby I continue to deepen my understandings of the learners' needs, and I continue to inform them of my methods and purpose, as well as their options in the classroom setting.

Initially, talk of a credential can be very confronting to some students, who, given time and the chance to "test the water", may choose to do it at a later date.

It was not until they were inspired to try for the CGE that they did try. It seems now that most students are interested. (30/10/94)

Whilst I realise that for some students in a different context this element of choice may not seem so essential, in the community setting in which I work it has been considered of utmost importance.

In the same way, my piano teacher offers her adult students a choice. She encourages us to listen widely to music and bring in examples we would like to learn or listen to. Some students choose to work through the Suzuki books, others prefer to play pieces that they like. She makes her purpose clear and respects the students' choices. I have chosen to work through the Suzuki books as a kind of a backbone for my learning, and can see the benefit of my choice, but I am grateful that I have the option, and therefore feel in control of my own learning.

Why the Certificate?

It is the purpose behind any pedagogical approach that is of key importance to its effectiveness. That is what will be felt by the teachers and in turn will affect the students' learning. What is the purpose, then, of the advent of competency-based education (in the form of the CGEA) into the adult literacy field? To what extent is it designed to enhance the students' learning and development? Or rather, to what extent is it designed to enable the outcomes of the program to be quantified in terms which are understood by economic rationalists in government and business in order to decide its dollar value .

Teachers of adult literacy, government officers, industry personnel and students

would all have a different understanding of the purpose of the CGEA... but the purpose overall is unclear. This is in contrast to the Suzuki approach which is clear in its purpose to facilitate musical development. The Suzuki teacher is answerable to the students, and a good measure of success will be their feelings about their progress. It is the student and the teacher, and perhaps people close to them who in fact judge the outcomes of the learning.

In contrast, adult literacy is reliant on funding and therefore answerable to government funding agencies, rather than to the students. A number of times recently I have heard the advice given, "Yes, it's fine, now just 'package it up' so it fits in with ...". In some senses this reshaping and redefining may bear no impact on the outcome for students. However, what are we doing when we 'package it up' to make it look like something else, in language which is not our own, and to meet someone else's (other than our own or our students') objectives? I wonder how far this ultimately steers one to work in a way which isn't our own?

Stephen Kemmis spoke about this at a participatory action research forum at Deakin University on 21/10/94:

> The structures within which we work promote certain kinds of irrationality, like the process of curriculum development that has made the whole of the curriculum for adult basic education do very well on paper with people moving from competency to competency, but not so well in lives: either the lives of students or the lives of teachers who are actually disrupted from the process of forming relationships with one another under which long term education is actually possible...

Like many other teachers I have experienced the benefits of the Certificate: it has given us a new focus and promoted a healthy dialogue amongst teachers about our practice; it has been useful in broadening my curriculum and in some cases, give feedback to students. However, I am concerned about its impact on pedagogy and I am concerned that the pressure from above weighs heavily on the work being done by teachers and students.

7. BETTER NUMERACY TEACHING WITH THE CGEA

The competency framework has changed my teaching for the better through facilitating a thematic approach which I am able to develop in tandem with the literacy teacher.

The main thrust of my teaching has always been to go with the flow, to generate stacks of fun and learning through play. This I have achieved through the use of role plays, stories and games (as my journal shows). For example, the lessons based on the 'mobius strip' used a hands-on approach which aimed at developing students' observation and deduction skills. It requires a certain amount of time and practice before it is possible to ascertain whether or not students have acquired problem-solving skills such as these. Skills of this kind also fall into Elements 2.5 and 2.6 of the General Curriculum Option ('Can communicate ideas and information 'and 'Can use mathematical ideas and techniques').

At our Centre we do not split up the four streams to be taught by four different teachers as it would be unrealistic to do so. The two literacy teachers take Reading, Writing and Oracy, I take Numeracy, and working as a team we give accreditation in the GCO as the need arises. The Certificate therefore calls for close co-operation and team spirit, which is a plus.

In the past I have always felt that my teaching was a bit too fragmented. Using a thematic approach is like adding flesh to the skeleton. It adds meaning to the content, involves students on a feeling level and adds a totally new dimension to numeracy. The following extract from my journal illustrates this:

> *This week has been spent on the reading of graphs. If this exercise is performed routinely it can be worse than boring. What can numb the brains more than looking at lines and columns? However like any other topic it can be brought alive: Element 2.1. can be satisfied at the same time as having fun! I tackled the exercise by photocopying line and bar graphs of rainfall and temperature of Australian capital cities from an atlas and made them into display cards to be used in groups. I then set a whole list of questions investigating the seasonal temperature cycle of the capital cities, calculating temperature range. The students further investigated the relationship between temperature range , latitude and geographical position. All the information was presented on the map. The level 2 students enjoyed the exercise, but on the other hand the level 1 students got headaches and felt giddy. One student commented that I wasn't teaching mathematics since I made them put information on a map, so it must be geography. I told her that if we just read lines and columns with no relation to the real world we would be bored to death. Note that although the fact that I wanted to prepare students for Element 2.1 or 1.1, was lurking in the back of my mind, this did not divert my main flow of energy. My main aim was that students discover the wonders of nature in action. Whatever element/s fell out of this exercise was secondary.*

We have tried to use a thematic approach across all streams; ie, all teachers in the same program develop different skills that all relate to the same theme. A common problem in working thematically in teams is that teachers cannot stay on the same

theme for the same length of time. If a teacher decides on a new theme, she tries to make sure that the other teachers follow suit.

My experience is that it had been an on-going battle for me to make students present their work in a reasonable form, self-check and validate their answers. The prevailing attitude had always been. "I know how to do it and therefore it's OK to just write the correct answers with no working". There are several drawbacks in such an attitude. The students, by not presenting their work in a reasonable and logical fashion, may miss out the link between language and mathematical symbols. It's a sloppy practice which creates sloppy attitudes which does not prepare them for making more complex calculations or for the work force. The students need to be sure that any solutions that they come up with make sense. I have been teaching them more than one way of reaching a solution. The performance criterion No. 3, 'check the reasonableness of methods against initial estimate and prediction' can be applied to validate one's own solution by any logical and reasonable means. Performance criterion No. 4 is also useful: 'interpret and apply methods and results in particular contexts and, in similar contexts'. Repetition of the skills in a variety of contexts is a very good way of ascertaining that students understand the concepts and so the skills are then portable. The ability to check and reflect on ones solutions builds confidence and self-esteem.

The certificate framework reinforces what I think is good practice in the classroom. It also provides a pathway for the students. Previously, students' skills were never formally recorded, so that it became a nightmare to establish the level of individual students in such a fluid student population. In that situation students may learn only part of a concept, ending up with huge gaps in their knowledge as they migrate from one provider to another. Teachers using the Certificate are forced to tighten their practice and not leave unpopular topics such as fractions to the year 2000. Students working through the Certificate should be able to observe their progress as they achieve their accreditation.

I think there is a prevailing attitude in adult education of being too scared to assess, despite the reality that assessments are carried out in the real world at all times. Sometimes I ask myself this question: are we teachers forming an artificial shield for the students? Yes, assessments can cause tension, as recorded in my diary :

> *There's difficulty addressing the amount of consultation that goes on in the class. Despite my previous efforts to explain the difference between an 'assessment task' and a 'task', students are still consulting each other. When I try to intervene, tension builds up, and this indeed is an awkward situation. Ideally I would like to handle all enquiries to make sure that the level of assistance given is no more than clarification of the problem. Remember I have 17 students all at different levels so all this negotiation is giving me a receding hair line! Recently a compromise was reached with a further assessment task given to 2 or 3 students who were given too much assistance.*

However I see these problems as teething problems. Students will eventually get used to the idea of being assessed and accept it. They may even see the advantage of being assessed when their skills are recognised and can be transferred.

I have always taught mixed levels and have customised my courses for individuals in class to suit their needs. This is very hard work and very time consuming but I choose to do so because I believe in giving the utmost to all my students. When students' needs clash with the requirements of the Certificate, it requires creative solutions. For example I had a student who wanted to further her studies in accountancy and was capable of doing so. She had a time limit of 6 months, and I wasn't going to plough through all the 4 levels in six months. After careful negotiation with her, we decided to cover the contents in the Foundation Certificate and then plunge into accelerated business mathematics. At the same time I would continue to design assessment tasks that also gave her some accreditation in levels 3 & 4 around the business mathematics. In this fashion I have fulfilled my student's needs and helped her to gain accreditation in the Certificate.

Having different levels (sometimes 4 in one class) can be very troublesome. Students are graded according to their ASLPR levels, not on numeracy, so all levels tend to be represented in one class. To overcome the problems this causes I use separate themes at the same time: one for level 3/4 and a different one for levels 1/2. I have found that it works a lot better this way.

My main complaints about the Certificate are: the administration required is time consuming; the performance criteria do not always fit what needs to be taught; there are too many different parts included in the one element (which makes it indigestible); the language used has to be modified into lay person's language to be accessible.

But I feel that these are problems that can be fixed and that the good points of the Certificate outweigh the bad.

Finally, I would like to offer this checklist of my responses to the CGEA and suggestions for its improvement:

Positive aspects of the CGEA:

- It provides a better pathway for numeracy.
- In the GCO, it enables us to be explicit about unconscious conceptual and group processes.
- It provides a workable framework for delivering training and assessing the skills related to these processes.
- It provides a good framework for co-operation between teachers running programs thematically.
- It provides a much better focus on actual skills for students.

Suggestions for improvement:

- Some elements should be broken into smaller parts.

- Separate set of performance criteria are needed for each element.
- At level 3, more emphasis should be placed on calculator skills. It is at a level where students could choose vocational electives for example: retail calculations which has a strong focus on accuracy using the calculator. Therefore a much stronger emphasis on using calculator functions M+M- and RM. As well there should be much more checking and validating of students' own answers at this level. These are bread and butter vocational skills.

- GCO Element 3, *Can use technology*, could be expanded as follows:
  - level 1, could include word processing and using graphic icons for drawing shapes;
  - levels 2/3 could include Excel (plotting bar and line graph pie chart);
  -level 3 could include Logo;
  -level 4 could include Excel for programming, number crunching, generating answers using formulae.

- I would like to see level 4 being split into vocational and bridging (ie, preparation for year 11 and VCE) extending to logic and algebra, etc.

- The vocational curriculum should focus on bread and butter skills as they relate to specific vocational areas, as follows:

Group1: commercial, clerical, community service, hospitality, housekeeping, retail or transport:
- -basic calculator skills
- -estimation and validation skills
- -basic book keeping skills:
  - petty cash
  - journals
  - payroll
  - one-write system

Group2: technical/trades/building

Group3: health sector/hospitality(food handling)

- The Certificate of Occupational Studies (COS) core has adopted the CGEA for the numeracy competencies. It is grossly unsuitable because retail and hospitality students don't want to know about alternate angles.

- It appears that there may be a significant number of students who will remain at level 2 in numeracy and literacy. This poses great problems: again we urgently require new creative pathways for such students.

Finally, I feel that in adult education, the resounding message is literacy including numeracy! This is certainly possible if curriculum is delivered holistically and thematically.

8. THE CGEA WITHIN THE VICTORIAN PRISON SYSTEM

Introduction

The introduction of the CGEA has had an enormous impact on ALBE teaching within the Victorian prison system as it has across the whole ALBE field in Victoria. Furthermore, as far as prison ALBE is concerned, the introduction of the CGEA has not been limited to Victoria; Western Australia and New South Wales have already begun to implement the CGEA within their prisons and other states have shown a keen interest.

Many of the issues which have arisen in relation to the CGEA in prison ALBE apply to the field more broadly but we do have our own set of issues related to the prison environment itself. All education and training in Victorian prisons is provided by the TAFE system. From the beginning of 1994, all ALBE programs in Victorian prisons and Youth Training Centres (YTCs) must be within an accredited course. While there are a few examples of vocationally focussed ALBE programs being offered within the Certificate in Occupational Studies (COS) in some Victorian prisons, most prison ALBE has had a more general education thrust and these programs must now be within the CGEA.

As the Head of Department of Basic and Continuing Education at Broadmeadows College of TAFE I have been responsible for implementing the CGEA within the metropolitan prisons and YTCs. Through the Corrections Educators' Association of Victoria (CEAV), which is made up of a network of practitioners across the prison system, we have been working towards a system-wide approach in attempting to improve educational pathways for prisoners as they move through the prison system.

In this paper I want to present a brief overview of the issues around the CGEA and its implementation as I have seen them in doing my job over the last year or so. I will consider both the positive and negative aspects and while many of my comments would apply to prison ALBE system-wide, it must be noted that no two prisons are identical. All of the metropolitan prisons are maximum security institutions and, on the whole they have a more highly transient population than the country prisons.

The positives

- I see the positive aspects of the CGEA as falling into three main categories:
- those related to staff development
- those related to prisoner students having access to a mainstream credential
- those related to the improvement of educational pathways across the prison system

Staff development

The introduction of the CGEA has meant prison ALBE teachers have had to re-evaluate their programs in the light of a new curriculum framework. For all, this has been a challenging task, involving substantial modifications and extensions to program content. In many cases, working behind the walls of 'closed' institutions, teachers had become very isolated and teaching methods and program content had

not changed along with developments in the broader ALBE field. Despite the changes imposed in 1990 when the TAFE sector took over responsibility for prison education from the Ministry of Education, traditionally, prison ALBE teachers were primary teachers, trained in Special Education. Many had been working in the prisons for years without engaging in staff development activities which brought them into contact with either primary or ALBE teachers outside the prisons.

The Victorian Adult English Language, Literacy and Numeracy Accreditation Framework (VAELLNAF) in which the CGEA is embedded has provided a focus for staff development. Whilst we may not agree with every detail of it, it has been the starting point for many teachers to reflect seriously upon their own conceptions of 'literacy' and think critically about both **what** and **how** they should be teaching. It has been particularly rewarding for me to witness the professional development of several teachers in the department who have welcomed the challenges and opportunities provided by the first major curriculum initiative which has seemed to have any relevance for their own teaching and their students.

With its requirements that teachers maintain records of students' work and engage in moderation activities, ALBE teachers in prisons, like ALBE teachers elsewhere, have been exposed to higher levels of scrutiny and accountability. Many have also been drawn into professional forums outside the prison system, and even those who have actively resisted such interaction (although the numbers are dwindling there are still a few in this category) have been affected by the changes.

Through the changes wrought by the introduction of the CGEA I sense an increased self-confidence amongst prison ALBE teachers as professionals. There was always a certain 'bravado' about the group but as an outsider, coming into both the TAFE and prison education systems in 1991, it had seemed a predominantly defensive stance, imbued with the atttitude that just to be able to 'get along with' prisoners was enough. Actually doing some hard critical thinking about what and how we should be teaching them in literacy programs was effectively blocked by notions that it was too hard to achieve anything useful given the constraints imposed by the system. Of course, the CGEA alone is not responsible for the change in culture I'm pointing to. Other factors, such as the influx of outsiders like myself have played a role. The crux of it all, however, seems to be the fact that new ideas - about what we should be doing, how we should be doing it and what we might realistically aspire to achieve - have wormed their way into what was previously a fairly closed system. The CGEA has been a critical part of this process.

Access to Mainstream Credentials

This is an important motivating factor for both prisoner students and their teachers. Like most adult learners, ALBE students in prisons have instrumental educational aims. They want to learn things that will be useful to them and a credential which doesn't label them as an ex-prisoner is important.

Given the relatively short sentences of most prisoners (less than six months and that spent in a series of institutions) it is important that we do our best to set our students up to continue with their education on release. Mainstream credentials are essential for this.

A balance must be achieved, of course, in meeting the needs of particular groups (eg youth, women and indigenous people) within the prison population. The arguments and issues here, however are no different to those which apply for the non-prisoner population. What we want to avoid is any increase in the marginalisation of already marginalised groups.

Educational Pathways Across the Prison System

As mentioned previously, movement is an inherent part of the prison system. Given the predominance of short sentences and the movement of prisoners from prison to prison it is essential that educational pathways are developed across the whole system. The VAELLNAF and CGEA have contributed to improvements here, although the problems are not as readily solved as we'd like. At least all ALBE teachers are 'speaking the same language' curriculum-wise and are engaged in what is finally a statewide moderation process.

We still have all the issues relating to effective information and student record flow between prison education centres and various approaches to 'atomising' the curriculum to deal with. (More on the latter, later.)

THE NEGATIVES

These seem to fall into four main categories:

- the administrative burdens
- the 'atomising' of the curriculum
- the gulf between ALBE and 'vocational' programs
- problems within the curriculum framework itself

None of these, I would argue are insurmountable obstacles, rather they point to the need for an effective evaluation process and the need to find that delicate balance between retaining as much flexibility as possible in the way in which any individual student can gain a CGEA and ensuring the credential is widely recognised as valuable.

The administrative burdens

The moderation and record-keeping requirements of the CGEA are seen by many teachers as burdensome and taking away from valuable teaching time. Although there have been difficulties in establishing an effective moderation process, I see it as crucial if the credential is to have validity. What we need to guard against, I think is rigid processes which teachers see as unnecessarily cumbersome and not serving the interests of the students. As teachers become more familiar with the CGEA and processes become established I think these aspects will be less of a concern.

There will remain the issue, however, of funding for teachers to attend moderation meetings. Within the prison ALBE area, funded by TAFE, this has been less of a problem with a relatively low proportion of our teachers employed on a sessional basis. (The impending privatisation may change this.)

The atomising of the curriculum

How to divide a curriculum into small 'chunks' whilst retaining its integrity is an issue which faces everyone teaching short-term students. The way in which the VAELLNAF is organised- into modules which are themselves composed of elements- encourages a simplistic carving up which runs contrary to all ideas of good practice.

Within prison ALBE there have been some disturbing trends in this direction. I would argue the way to counteract such trends is to produce and share examples of smaller units of work which show an integrated approach. Staff development must be the key here. Sound practice is based on a sound understanding of the meaning of 'literacy' itself and this is contentious philosophical territory. There does not seem to me to be any way to design a curriculum framework for ALBE which will be both broadly acceptable and yet impervious to a narrow 'skills-based' approach given the common-sense view of what literacy is.

The gulf between ALBE and vocational programs

To an extent, the introduction of the CGEA has reinforced the notion of a fundamental divide between 'general education' and 'vocational education'. The VAELLNAF is essentially a basic education curriculum framework with the Curriculum Options tacked onto the end. Despite the fact that adult basic education students, and particularly prisoner adult basic education students, are going to be at the end of the jobs queue, our students themselves frequently see education as a means of improving their employment prospects. And, given the gatekeeping function of literacy in our society, they are right.

We cannot afford to ignore the 'vocational' because a 'critical literacy' stance is more ideologically palatable. We must find ways to combine the two. I see this as beginning to happen already with projects such as those looking at cross-crediting between CGEA and COS.

Problems with the curriculum framework

This is probably the greatest source of complaint from teachers. A competency-based framework is only ever going to be as good as the competencies and performance criteria themselves. ALBE teachers in prisons have the same kinds of complaints as others across the ALBE field, including: widespread problems with the Oral Communication and Numerical and Mathematical Concepts streams; concerns about 'standards' and how to include legitimately, content criteria in relation to Curriculum Options; and problems with some of the performance criteria in the Reading and Writing stream. It's interesting that the Reading and Writing stream which was developed through such an extensive consultation process has been so much less problematic than the other three around which there was little consultation. There must be a lesson to be learnt here if we are going to have an effective evaluation process leading to improvements.

CONCLUSIONS

Overall, I think the introduction of the CGEA has had significant benefits for the teaching of ALBE in prison settings. Of course, there have been problems around the implementation: some to do with the curriculum initiative itself, and some to do

with the more general issue of people's responses to change. For the CGEA to gain widespread acceptance as a valid and useful credential, I think two main things must happen: first we need to have a thorough and open evaluation process out of which significant changes to the underlying framework would come; and secondly, we need to work at finding ideologically acceptable ways to bridge the gap between 'vocational' and 'general' education and incorporating them into the CGEA.

9. THE USE OF AUTHENTIC TEXTS FRUSTRATED BY RIGID DOMAINS

I have been teaching level 2 reading and writing groups this year. I teach across campuses, working with a group who are predominantly ESB students and a group who mainly come from ESL backgrounds. I teach each of these groups for six hours per week, with the time table structured this year to ensure that we spend one entire day together. In this way we can work substantially on texts and tasks and avoid the frustrating experience of running out of time and attempting to carry activities over into ensuing weeks or days.

Working for a whole day together means that there is ample time for the range of teaching and learning activities that I like to use within a given session. The needs which I perceive in these classrooms are:

- enough time for adequate discussion,
- students working with and advising each other in small groups,
- drafting, conferencing and redrafting student writing,
- time to use multiple texts,
- time to read silently and aloud,
- time for stopping where necessary to move beyond current text(s),
- time for students to work so that they experience completion and/or success,
- time for teaching where and when the need is seen,
- time to use texts which students bring in to the classroom, and
- time to make use of the library or other resources and to link the students directly into current classroom discourses.

Of course not all these issues are addressed every day, but they remain the ongoing concerns which I bring to the classrooms. Additional concerns that I have are:

- that students are made to feel comfortable at all times so they are willing to take risks,
- that students are active participants in their learning,
- that each student's success is seen as relative and judged in terms of his or her own progress,
- that students are free to wonder and question,

- that I am seen not as a body of knowledge and expertise, but as someone who will assist in these processes,
- that texts we use in the classrooms are authentic and available to anyone who is a member of a community,
- that students show some change in skills, knowledges and attitudes through being challenged by text, each other and by me,
- that these challenges are not confrontationist in nature, damaging to self esteem nor denigrating of students' realities, lifestyles and cultural standings, and
- that students with difference are active members of the group and are valued for their abilities, not excused or excluded because of disability.

Both these groups, if you can generalise about groups, began this year as very tentative readers and writers. One group actually showed more courage in approaching written texts and saw their needs as mostly ones of writing. The other group consisted of students who were very nervous readers and displayed extreme anxiety with any writing task. Both groups have caused me enormous concern because I felt that they had to develop some confidence with text, but could only do this through experiencing success with text. How to achieve this has been my constant worry.

One way I have attempted to address this is to concentrate on reading. Not reading, as decoding is often called reading, but reading for what authors are doing in texts; how they put the information together; the sort of evidence and examples they provide; the way they begin texts; the way they finish them off; why they were written in the first place; how they influenced us; how they may have been intended to influence us. Always I have tried to highlight the link between reading and writing: that while these can be separate entities, or activities, reading is impossible without an author in the first place, and writing is only meaningful if it has an audience. For this reason, I have not used diaries and journals in these classrooms this year, although I have used them in the past with other groups for different reasons.

My aim then has been to draw actively on the links between reading and writing, highlighting both as active interactionary processes. I feel I have had a fair degree of success, in that students are less afraid of writing, and are even willing to share it. Perhaps of even more importance is the talking about what we have read, what we have written (or tried to write) and I feel extremely satisfied with this.

My concern though is that when I 'think Certificate', I know that these three processes are separated, that they are prescribed in ways that actually polarise integrated parts of processes. Just when I have come to a collective way of thinking about reading, writing, publicising learning and making choices about modes of communicating this learning, the credential that I wish to make available to these students is the antithesis of what I am coming to believe about active participation

in the discourses of our worlds and communities. A year ago, two years ago, I would have been really excited about what I am learning and about the learning I am witnessing as I watch the confidence of individuals grow and strength of the groups cement as students learn to trust each other as well as themselves. This excitement of mine is constantly being tempered by thoughts of guilt and inadequacy because I do not think many of these students will be able to receive a Foundation Certificate in December, 1994.

A constant source of frustration to me is the Range and Conditions that are written for texts at level 2. In my attempt to use authentic texts, I have discovered that the Herald Sun, The Age, magazines and brochures are not using the same criteria in their production of text.

Recently I attended a moderation session. I took along samples of both responses to readings and student writing at level 2 which I had, in the classroom context, celebrated in a big way. I felt the students were beginning to be critical, to be brave, to be adventurous. They told me I could take their work. They were proud that it was going to be looked at by other teachers because I felt they were good examples of their developing abilities. Up to this point I had been desperately pouring over Performance Criteria (another issue for later!) and was pretty well convinced that these had been met. The discussion around the table did not centre on PC, but on the range and conditions because, as they did not believe it met the range and conditions of a level 2 text, the whole exercise was virtually disqualified (my choice of term, not theirs). The student's 'performance' was irrelevant, not considered, because the text was 'too hard'. What <u>were</u> considered appropriate were texts that had been 'plain Englished' to meet the range and conditions.

The resolution at that meeting is actually irrelevant to this report. The issue that is relevant, for me, is that students stand to be disadvantaged because of restrictions and limitations that are formally put on them as learners, and on me as facilitator of their learning as to the type of texts that are seen to be legitimate for them. Whether or not the Certificate (or those who wrote it) intended this to be the case, the truth is that it is the way it is being interpreted in the field. My own stance is that I REFUSE to allow students to be shielded, removed or protected from hard words, complex sentences, complex arguments that are part of their daily lives and discourses (and certainly part of the texts on television) and to insult them with simple sentences and simple debates, which is largely what the range and conditions of a level 2 text demand.

Unfortunately for me, I cannot argue this very effectively in moderation sessions. The document states that, for example, a 'Reading for Knowledge' text "will deal mostly with a familiar topic in mostly everyday language" and "describes relationships between events, phenomena or ideas sequentially". If at moderation I am challenged on the sequence, for example, or the everyday language, and the group vetos my text despite the fact that the student has dealt with the text, then it is not accepted as moderated. Where does this leave a student? Where does it leave me? Inventing assessment tasks that are out of context with student growth and classroom dynamics and interests? This is a real dilemma for me. I find the range and conditions for all domains at level 2 limiting and my feeling from hearing others talk

is that this is consistent for those who teach at other levels.

The issue of genre is one that concerns me too. In my everlasting search for authentic texts, I find the rigidness of the descriptions of these domains, or genres, frustrating. On one occasion I was writing in my planner and recording texts and domains (we have provision for this in our session planners). I wrote 'Public Debate', crossed it out and wrote 'Knowledge'. Not happy with this, I thought finally that it was Self Expression. But this was not true. Hard to believe I was so stupid? I asked another teacher what she thought. Finally we decided it was not one these, it was all of these. What was an interesting session in the classroom was a real problem for moderation.

I do not wish to enter into a debate, here, of the inconsistencies of the performance criteria across and between levels. It seems to me they have been stated over and over at meetings and at moderation sessions. I hope something is being done to address these concerns. I do need to say something though about the domain of 'Practical Purposes'. I find these performance criteria more difficult than any of the others. In some ways I can manipulate the others to fit in with what I call 'good practice', but 'Practical Purposes' is constantly a problem. One reason that I see for this is the 'procedure' aspect of it. I used a text one day which I felt was good for 'Practical Purposes' - it involved reading your way around a TV Guide, interpreting the abbreviations that are typical to a TV Guide, working out lengths of programs and designing a balanced viewing night for yourself (balanced between informative and entertaining). I felt, as I have said, that this was a practical reason for reading and writing, but there was no procedure. In order to bring procedure into the classroom it has to be removed from its real context and set up, contrived, pretended to be purposeful. There are few classroom situations that call for text to be read and instructions followed and performed and then documented and assessed. I feel very strongly, that while a rewrite is in need right around the Certificate, the issue of 'Practical Purposes' needs seriously to be addressed.

Our interviewing process ensures that students at similar stages are in groups together (this is not foolproof of course, but it is roughly good enough) so I do not have issues of multi levels within a reading and writing group. It does seem to me though that I need to explain that I do not teach the Certificate. I teach to the needs of the students and for those who I feel are approaching Exit level 2, I look at the details in the Certificate (performance criteria, range and conditions) retrospectively. There are not enough students interested in the Certificate to justify a more rigorous teaching to it. My rigour is directed at text! Many students are not interested in the Certificate (luckily for me, many students are not interested in the Certificate. How could you possibly give a student Exit level 2 on the Numeracy stream as it currently stands? Where does this leave the notion of a Foundation Certificate? I have students I want to move to a level 3 group next year. How can I do this while I continue to actively resist introducing assessment tasks to our classrooms? These always appear like tests and inevitably students adopt a pass/fail mentality.

There is enough evidence in their folders, but more importantly in their belief in themselves, for me to be able, with a clear conscience, to move them to a level 3

reading and writing group in 1995. I will do what many teachers will do. I will use my professional understandings and definitions of success, few of which are mentioned in the Certificate, to make that decision. In working with a document that is fundamentally flawed, there is no other choice.

10. THE CGEA STIFLES CREATIVITY AND CONFIDENCE

I am going to begin this report with the final comment from my reflective journal:

> *Anyway, at this stage I think we need to come up with something more realistic and less restrictive... to say the least. I am a bit embarrassed about being so negative but I am the poor soul who is now struggling to enjoy something I used to love! But then maybe I'm doing quite well... who knows?*

I am not a negative person and I most definitely love my role as a teacher. How then did I so spontaneously write the above comment? For a number of reasons. The CGEA stifles creativity and confidence and has the potential to remove the students away from being the main focus of my teaching. I believe a new numeracy section must be written, to cater for ALBE students. Hard words I admit but I no longer apologise for them.

As I was asked to reflect on how the CGEA (Numeracy) has impacted on my practice, I shall restrict my comments to the numeracy area.

The numeracy section of the document is, I believe, unusable in its present form. At its best, it cramps a natural 'good practice' approach to numeracy teaching and allows for only the most contrived of assessment tasks if one is to attempt to match all the performance criteria to each element. (And that is the rule, as far as I understand it). For example, level 2, Performance Criterion 1, asks students to:

> Recognise that mathematics is involved in the activity,
> Identify mathematics for use, and
> Make a reasonable prediction of the expected result.

Firstly, how is it possible to assess the first part of these three performance criteria in a natural way, beyond just asking if maths is involved in the activity? There are plenty of times when as a group such a discussion would occur but it becomes stifling to <u>have to</u> ask it for all tasks that are to be assessed and then to have to record the students' response.

Secondly, it is laborious (to put it kindly) to have to work to fulfil performance criteria such as these. If one third is not achieved, then must it be assumed that the whole element has not been met?

The document has created an unnecessary obsession with assessment. As soon as someone can do an activity or task, there is a tendency to want to make sure that it is recorded for CGEA 'evidence'. (It wasn't so important that a student had successfully performed a certain skill but that it would somehow match the performance criteria, as set out in the frameworks.)

Prior to attempting to implement the CGEA, I have always kept 'running records' and anecdotal jottings about a student's efforts and performance and was always confident that I could discuss a person's progress and skills easily and with relevance. Now these records seem unnecessary and yet they give me a far greater pic-

ture of a student than the performance criteria of the numeracy modules. So, self doubt grows... am I missing a hidden value somewhere? Have I not been doing 'good practice' in the past with my anecdotal records?

At moderation sessions I was concerned by the emphasis on assessment. While I recognise the need to evaluate students' work and maintain accountability at all times, assessment has not been my main focus. There is this awful feeling of becoming obsessed with collecting samples of work. The nightmare associated with this, is that it is impossible to fulfil the requirements of the frameworks - without contriving the most unreal of tasks.

Strangely, (and I'm not sure I can explain this on paper!) I feel the numeracy section in the CGEA is too 'formal' for the ALBE students I am responsible for. It is so inflexible, restrictive or narrow that it separates the students from their needs. I generally use numeracy to extend a student's literacy skills as much as to develop 'pure' numeracy skills and to develop their confidence. I find now that my literacy and numeracy don't integrate as naturally as in the pre-CGEA days. The CGEA doesn't sit happily with the integration of numeracy and literacy as a natural occurrence yet this is essential for level 1 and 2 students.

It is difficult to say whether it is the document alone that has so disrupted my teaching or the document combined with the way it has been implemented. I do not believe the numeracy section is a workable document in its current form, nor does it reflect (nor cater for) my philosophy as an ALBE teacher. Is it right that I have to alter so drastically my teaching practice to enable me to issue a CGEA? I hope not.

Certainly, there have been some positives that have come out of the CGEA, for example the necessity of moderation has forced teachers together and provided an invaluable opportunity for discussion and sharing. This must be continued and built on, as the need in the ALBE field for peer support and sharing is enormous. Having the strands and attributes clearly defined is a great resource for a numeracy teacher and is a point of reference to ensure a full and varied program. The *Background Works* are my lifeline and I would like to see these along with the other positives I have mentioned, combine with some creative and 'ALBE type thinking' to reconstruct the numeracy section of the CGEA into a realistic, workable and enjoyable document.

11. We are Not Experts, Yet!

I teach in courses in an access area for students who may not be ready for, or confident enough to enter into mainstream education, often having been away from formal training environments for many years. Most have not had positive experiences with education in the past and are now dubious about what they can offer and what education can offer them.

The students range in age from 15 to 60, and cover a broad spectrum of races, educational backgrounds and human needs. Students bring with them life experiences and problems which may or may not affect their performance in the classroom and their ability to reinforce skills outside the classroom environment (ie, homework or off -campus research).

English speaking background students within the classroom have different needs from non-English speaking background students and these can be met in an integrated program based on the CGEA. Based on personal experience, I believe students of non-English speaking backgrounds require a minimum ASLPR level of 1+ / 2 in speaking and listening to participate effectively within a CGEA program.

There are many aspects of effective communication which students need to have some mastery of, in order to communicate effectively and therefore participate fully at work or in the community: for example, grammar, pronunciation, spelling, punctuation and an understanding of the purpose, audience and genre implicit in any communication.

Unfortunately, the CGEA does not allow for some of these areas to be given sufficient time and emphasis in the classroom. The four domains (as they are currently described) exclude a number of important genres or styles of communication. The writing of letters of application and resumes (which are fundamental skills in prevocational Adult Basic Education and ESL courses) do not fit easily into any of the streams or domains. Neither do business letters, poetry, visual literacy (working with pictorial or graphic material) fit easily within the designated categories.

In general, students are positive about the opportunity to work towards something more significant than just another short course certificate. The majority of students have expressed their desire to work towards the CGEA and returning students have stated their desire to continue on this educational pathway before moving into a more vocationally specific course or further education in the mainstream. These students are working to complete set assessment tasks. Students not wishing to participate in the CGEA are also encouraged to complete assessment tasks in order to further extend their skills.

Some students leave the decision to the teacher as to whether or not they participate in the formal assessment of the CGEA. Each student has different needs, demands and requirements and so courses need to be specifically tailored to meet their needs.

Until the present time, four groups of students have been enrolled in CGEA cours-

es in our TAFE college. The implementation of the CGEA has involved setting up a new system within an already complex enrolment process and co-ordinators have encountered some difficulties in relation to enrolment policies, the issuing of certificates and statements of attainment. One of the difficulties teachers and co-ordinators face is the need to enrol students into the anticipated level that they will exit at the end of the course.

In the past, the practice has been to make an initial assessment of the students' oracy and literacy skills in order to place them into courses in specific subject areas at appropriate levels. This becomes complicated when the CGEA course covers a number of levels. There is also the problem of whether a student entering at level 3 needs to enrol in levels 1 and 2 in order to be credited with having passed the lower levels. If not, the RPL process must be set in place. In larger institutions this entails a cost. Most students completing these courses are unemployed and may not be able to afford this additional cost. Can we use the initial assessment tests to exempt students from the levels they have already exceeded? If we do not enrol students in the lower levels then there is no record of them having completed or received a credential for these streams unless they go through the formal RPL process. Undoubtedly, these problems will iron themselves out as more and more students are enrolled in the CGEA. As yet, students have been shielded from the problems.

All students learn skills at different rates. The specified 'nominal' 80 hours per stream per level, may be seen as the maximum figure for student training time in terms of monetary allowance or training time allowances from DEET. In a 360 hour course, delivered over one semester, the actual literacy and numeracy component may be limited to much less time than this overall. If the student does not reach the exit level that she is enrolled in, what is recorded next to the students official subject record - F- Fail ? N - not complete? Can students re-enrol into the same level and stream and continue on without having a fail recorded next to their name?

The dissemination of information on the CGEA has been slow and not always effective. Many different training groups are still without knowledge and understanding of the Victorian Frameworks. Industry-based training groups have been left out of much of the preliminary professional development and teacher training. Even community centres, neighbourhood houses and TAFE colleges are still experiencing initial shock reactions to the principles, guidelines, responsibilities of delivery, and the language of the CGEA.

From the point of view of vocational or industrial training, the domains within the reading, writing and oracy streams may not always be relevant. This may be a particular issue for workplace basic education programs funded by industry. Primarily, the material will have a specific industry focus and employers may not regard the domains of self-expression and public debate as appropriate. This makes the offering of statements of attainment to the students problematic.

The professional development programs provided over the past two year period has enabled teachers and co-ordinators to develop and enhance their ability to deliver the CGEA. However, new providers and trainers should also be entitled to the same introductory professional development sessions where terminology, moderation and

assessment requirements, support materials and support mechanisms are discussed.

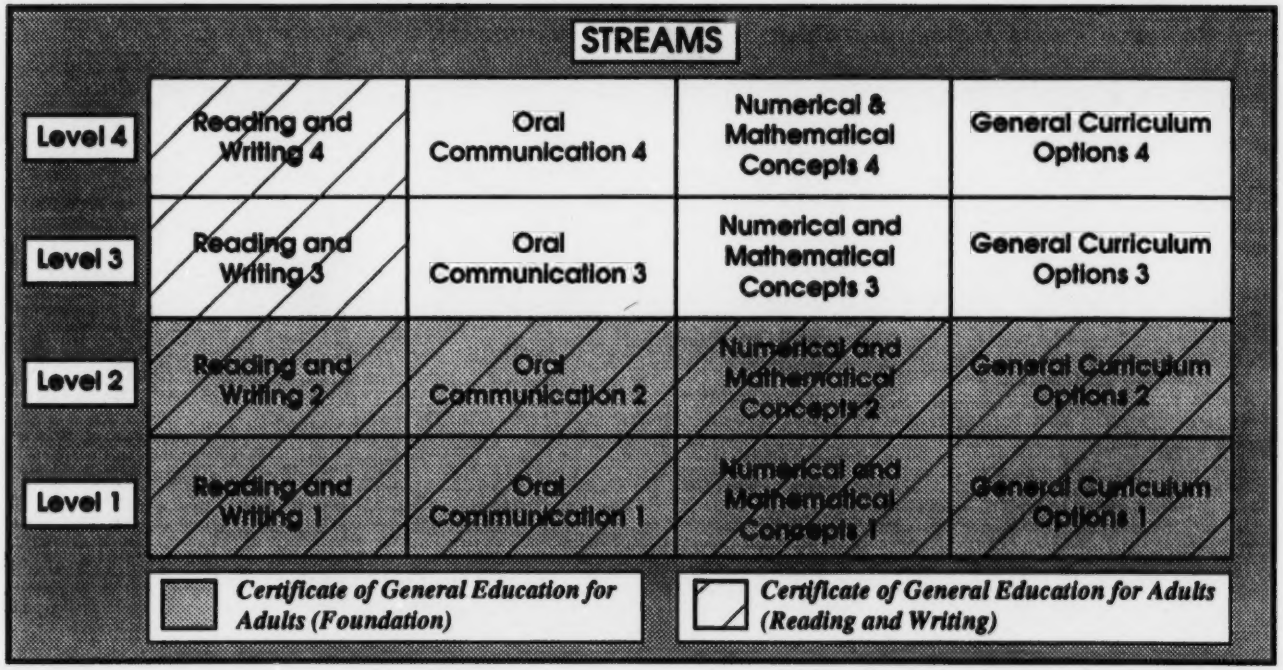
It is a difficult certificate to teach and to implement and it challenges many of our usual pedagogical practices. However, it does enable us to stop and take a good look at our teaching strategies, practices and philosophies. It is important for teachers to develop a pedagogical perspective as there are different theories and pedagogies relating to 'adult literacy' and 'ESL' respectively. Whether we agree or disagree with all demands of the CGEA, we as professionals must use its existence to enhance and develop our own skills and understandings of processes of teaching and learning.

Like all new things there must be time to trial, implement, question, improve and re-write. We must continue to do so until re-accreditation takes place. With an experienced project team and enough money to review the CGEA in 1995, it could become a prestigious certificate and gain the recognition and support it demands.

If the re-accreditation process is done scantily, the CGEA could very well end up on a shelf with the dozen associated projects and be replaced by the National Framework. My hope is that this does not happen! Teachers of ALBE in Victoria deserve to have their efforts in developing and teaching the CGEA recognised and students have the right to a recognised training course.

As someone recently said, teaching the CGEA demands patience, tolerance a sense of humour and understanding - remember, we are not experts - yet!

Certificate of General Education for Adults



BEST COPY AVAILABLE

SUMMARY OF READING AND WRITING COMPETENCIES

Suggested changes have been made to some of these performance criteria (below) through the Annotated Agreed Variations Process.

Self Expression	Practical Purposes	Knowledge	Public Debate
Module 4: Read and write at a level that displays more detailed technical knowledge and vocabularly and sophisticated language use, includes more objective and analytical processes, and is precisely structured and sustained in length.			
Write a longer narrative, recount or piece of creative/imaginative/expressive writing Demonstrate that meaning has been gained from reading a more complex, sustained narrative or literary text	Write a more complex text on unfamiliar processes Demonstrate that meaning has been gained from reading a complex practical text that describes an unfamiliar procedure	Write an informative, explanatory or academic report Demonstrate that meaning has been gained from reading a reference or informative text that is complex in presentation and content	Write a reasoned argumentative text Demonstrate that meaning has been gained from reading a complex persuasive text
Module 3: Read and write at a level that displays emerging technical knowledge and vocabulary, a developing personal style, increasing complexity in language use and a growing capacity to sustain longer pieces of work.			
Write a short text about less immediate aspects of personal life and experience Demonstrate that meaning has been gained from reading a more complex narrative or literary text of at least one page in length	Write a more complex procedural text Demonstrate that meaning has been gained from reading a more complex practical text that describes an unfamiliar procedure	Write an informative or explanatory report Demonstrate that meaning has been gained from reading a reference or informative text on an unfamiliar topic	Write an argumentative text that justifies an opinion Demonstrate that meaning has been gained from reading a persuasive text on an abstract topic
Module 2: Read and write at a level no longer entirely concrete nor only related to personal experience but starting to show some diversity in organisation and style			
Write a paragraph which describes personal routines and familiar situations Demonstrate that meaning has been gained from reading a simple, less familiar narrative or literary text	Write a short procedural sequence in a familiar format Demonstrate that meaning has been gained from reading a practical text that describes a familiar procedure	Write a short well-organised report on one subject Demonstrate that meaning has been gained from reading a short reference or informative text on a mostly familiar topic	Write a simple argument expressing a point of view on a matter of personal interest Demonstrate that meaning has been gained from reading a short persuasive text on a familiar topic
Module 1: Read and write a concrete text that is related to personal experience or the familiar, and is short and rudimentary in format and style			
Write one or two sentences recounting a simple personal activity, idea or experience Demonstrate that meaning has been gained from reading a simple narrative or literary text	Write a simple practical text of 1-2 sentences Demonstrate that meaning has been gained from reading a simple familiar practical text	Write several facts about a familiar or personal subject Demonstrate that meaning has been gained from reading a simple reference or informative text	Write a statement of opinion on a familiar matter Demonstrate that meaning has been gained from reading a simple persuasive text

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

READING AND WRITING — MODULE 2

Element 2.1: Writing for Self Expression

Write a paragraph which describes personal routines and familiar situations

Performance Criteria:

1. Combine 2 - 4 personally familiar events, ideas or experiences
2. Refer to some external factors, including other times and places
3. Use pronouns correctly
4. Use descriptive details about contexts and thoughts considered unfamiliar to the reader
5. Write a coherent paragraph linked by language devices of time
6. Spell with spasmodic accuracy
7. Use standard grammar spasmodically

Range/Conditions:

1. Familiar subject matter related to personal life and meaning
2. Use of dictionary of own choice

Examples of texts:

stories, poetry, autobiographies, diaries, journals, plays, myths and legends, creative writing, greeting cards, interviews (magazines, TV, radio), TV soapies, films ("real life" documentaries, biographies)

Examples of assessment tasks:

- Write a short job history as part of a job application letter
- Write about one highlight of your weekend

ORAL COMMUNICATION — MODULE 2

Element 2.1 *Oracy for Self Expression*

Can participate in short social episodes - relatively structured exchanges with an interpersonal rather than transactional goal.

Performance Criteria

1. Talk about several personally familiar events, ideas or experiences
2. Include a broader view than the personally immediate
3. Intelligibility occasionally makes demands on other participants
4. Inconsistent use of interactional routines; some topic setting and supporting
5. Some provision of feedback

Range/Conditions

1. Few, known people
2. In a participative role
3. Involving a number of turns

Texts and Assessment Tasks

Task
Roleplay

Text/context - example
Recount (weekend activities)

Method
Checklist - teacher/tutor

NUMERICAL AND MATHEMATICAL — MODULE 2

Elements:

2.1 Interpret data and organise it into tables and charts

2.2 Develop and use data, number, measurement and shape relationships

2.3 Use natural number and common fraction/decimal fraction/percentage equivalents

2.4 Use estimation and calculation with shape and direction

Performance Criteria for all elements at this level:

1. Recognise that mathematics is involved in the activity
   Identify mathematics for use
   Make a reasonable prediction of the expected result
2. Carry out the mathematics required using a number of familiar methods and/or appropriate technology
3. Check the reasonableness of methods and result against initial estimate and prediction
4. Interpret and apply methods and results in particular contexts and, in similar contexts
5. Describe and record method and result using familiar language including some formal symbolic and graphical representation

Range/Conditions:

At Level 2 the activity or task:

- contains clear mathematical information
- is located in a reasonably familiar social, personal, work or cultural context
- uses language that is straight-forward and informal and may contain some formality including mathematical symbolic representation

Examples of assessment tasks:

Interpret probability of rain as a common percentage e.g. 10% probability of rain
Calculate the distance between two locations on a map (simple scale only)
Interpret a 5 km distance race as number of 400m laps to be run

GENERAL CURRICULUM OPTIONS — MODULE 2

Element 2.1: *Can collect, analyse and organise information*

Performance Criteria:

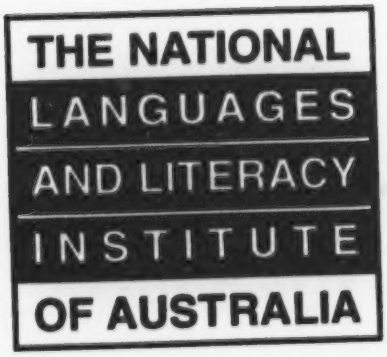
1. Follow existing guidelines for the collection, analysis, and organisation of information
2. Access and record information from given sources
3. Organise information into predetermined categories
4. Check information for completeness and accuracy

Range and Conditions:

1. The subject matter will be everyday and may include some unfamiliar aspects
2. The established guidelines for the completion of the task may need to be interpreted for the present situation
3. The nature of the task will be simple, with information required from more than one source or a more complex task with information from a single source

Examples of assessment tasks:

Accessing routine information from a more complex listing, such as Yellow Pages
Determining from class members an optimum excursion date and venue
Updating a simple resource list


THE NATIONAL
LANGUAGES
AND LITERACY
INSTITUTE
OF AUSTRALIA